



fight the flu



[October 29, 2009]

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

WHAT IS H1N1?

H1N1 is a new strain of the influenza A virus (2009). The World Health Organization (WHO) has declared it a pandemic virus. It contains a combination of genes from pigs (swine), birds (avian) and human flu viruses that have never previously been detected in humans and swine.

HOW DOES IT SPREAD?

H1N1 spreads the same way as the seasonal flu – from person to person through “droplets” that are released through the air when an infected person coughs and sneezes. The droplets can then be breathed in by others.

The virus can also be contracted by shaking hands that are contaminated with the virus or touching a contaminated hard surface, such as a counter or door handle. A person then becomes infected by touching their eyes, nose or mouth. The flu virus can live on your hands for 5 minutes and on doorknobs, and other hard surfaces, for 1 to 2 days.

SHOULD I WEAR A MASK TO KEEP FROM GETTING SICK?

No. The Public Health Agency of Canada does not recommend that members of the general public wear surgical masks to protect against contracting the H1N1 Flu Virus. Evidence shows that this is not effective in preventing transmission of flu in the general public.

HOW CAN I PROTECT MYSELF FROM GETTING THE FLU?

- **Clean your hands**
Wash your hands frequently with soap and water, or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- **Cover your cough**
Cough and sneeze into your arm or sleeve, not your hand.
- **Avoid your eyes, nose and mouth**
Do not touch your eyes, nose or mouth after shaking hands or touching hard surfaces like counters, door handles or other surfaces that may harbour flu and other viruses. Keep common surfaces clean and disinfected.
- **Keep your distance**
Stay at least 2 metres (6 feet) away from people who are experiencing flu-like symptoms. This is called social distancing and includes staying away from crowds when flu is circulating in the community.
- **Stay rested, eat well and exercise**
- **Get your flu shot**
There are 2 different flu shots this season – one for the seasonal flu and one for H1N1. For detailed immunization clinic information, including dates, times and locations, visit www.albertahealthservices.ca.



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HOW DO I KNOW IF I HAVE A COLD OR THE FLU?

Description / Symptoms	Flu	Common Cold	Stomach Upset*
Virus involved	Influenza A or B Pandemic H1N1 influenza virus is a type of influenza A.**	Many different viruses such as rhinovirus, coronavirus, etc.	Norovirus (Norwalk-like viruses) is the most common
Fever	Usually high, beginning suddenly and lasting 3-4 days	Sometimes	Rarely
Headache	Usually, can be severe	Rarely	Sometimes
Chills, aches, pain	Usually, and often severe	Rarely	Common
Loss of appetite	Sometimes. H1N1 symptoms may also include nausea, vomiting and diarrhea	Sometimes	Frequently – usually nausea, vomiting and diarrhea occur as well
Cough	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely
Sore throat	Sometimes	Usually	Rarely
Sniffles or sneezes	Sometimes	Usually	Rarely
Extreme Tiredness	Usually – tiredness may last 2-3 weeks or more	Rarely	Sometimes
Involves whole body	Usually	Never	Stomach and bowel only
Symptoms appear quickly	Yes	More gradual	Yes
Possible Complications (Health problems)	Pneumonia, Kidney Failure, swelling of the brain and death	Sinus infection or ear infection	Dehydration (losing more fluid than you take in)
Vaccine	Vaccines for seasonal flu and H1N1 are available.	No vaccine available.	No vaccine available.

* A stomach upset is sometimes incorrectly called the "stomach flu" – there is no such illness as "stomach flu." As noted in the chart, stomach upsets are caused by viruses and other micro-organisms but not by the influenza virus.

** Only viral culture in a laboratory can distinguish seasonal (regular) influenza from H1N1 influenza.

Source: <http://www.health.alberta.ca/health-info/influenza-compare-symptoms.html>



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WHERE CAN I GET A VACCINATION? WILL THERE BE A COST?

Alberta Health Services is offering the H1N1 vaccination in mass vaccination clinics across Alberta. All Albertans aged 6 months and older are eligible to receive the vaccine **free of charge**. Individuals at high risk for flu-related complications are encouraged to get their H1N1 vaccination as soon as possible. Vaccination is the best defence against the flu.

For detailed clinic information, including dates, times and locations, visit www.albertahealthservices.ca or call HEALTHLink Alberta at 1.866.408.LINK (5465).

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I THINK I HAVE THE FLU?

If you have symptoms of the flu, you should **stay at home** and practice self-care. **DO NOT COME TO CLASS OR WORK**. In particular, rest and avoid contact with others until you have been symptom-free for 24 hours and are feeling well and able to fully participate in normal day to day activities.

Early identification of illness is an important factor in controlling the spread of H1N1. You are encouraged to perform daily self-assessment for symptoms of the flu and stay home if experiencing the following (adult) symptoms:

Acute onset of a **NEW** cough or change in an existing cough **PLUS** one or more of the following:

- Fever (38C or higher)
- Sore throat
- Joint pain
- Muscle aches
- Severe exhaustion

If you are concerned you (or someone you care for) may have the flu, it is important to contact **HEALTHLink at 1.866.408.LINK (5465)** or your physician before visiting any doctor's office, health centre (including RDC's Health, Safety and Wellness Centre) or emergency room.

Most people who get the flu have mild symptoms and get better within one week without medical treatment. A small number of people develop more severe symptoms and require hospitalization. If you develop more severe symptoms, you need to see a health care provider right away. **More severe symptoms include:**

- Shortness of breath (rapid or difficulty breathing)
- Chest pain

WHAT IF I HAVE TO STAY HOME WITH THE FLU AND MISS CLASS?

RDC's top priority is the success of our students. If you are suffering from flu symptoms mentioned above, we strongly recommend that you stay home. We will endeavour to support you in your program of study through flexible learning.

If you are absent due to flu-like illness, please **email or phone your instructor(s) directly**. Supporting medical documentation (i.e., a doctor's note) is not required. This temporary action follows the guidelines of Alberta Health Services in cooperation with Alberta Advanced Education & Technology.



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IF I AM ABSENT FROM CLASS DUE TO THE FLU, DO I REQUIRE A DOCTOR'S NOTE?

NO. Students, staff and faculty do not require a doctor's note to confirm illness or recovery from the flu. Doctor's offices may be very busy and may not be able to provide such documentation in a timely way.

CAN WE PREVENT ILL STUDENTS FROM ATTENDING CLASS OR ILL FACULTY/STAFF FROM ATTENDING WORK?

No, we cannot prevent students or faculty/staff from attending the College. Individuals exhibiting flu-like symptoms are asked to practice self-isolation by staying home, for the health of themselves and all others of the College community.

With anyone exhibiting flu-like symptoms, we encourage you to practice social distancing – try to stay at least 2 metres (6 feet) away from them. Make sure you wash your hands and limit contact with surfaces they may have infected. You may also remind your sick students/colleagues that they should stay home until they have recovered.

WHAT HAPPENS TO MY FUNDING IF I'M AWAY FROM THE COLLEGE WHILE I GET BETTER?

If you are away from classes because of the flu, RDC will make every effort to support your funding needs to assist you in continuing your program of study in collaboration with our funding partners. Further financial assistance may be available for eligible students should a pandemic result in the decision to extend your study period.

WILL THE COLLEGE CLOSE IF STUDENTS AND STAFF GET THE FLU?

RDC does not expect to close due to the H1N1 flu virus. No cancellations to public events or large gatherings are anticipated at this time either.

If there are unusual circumstances that call for the College to be closed or cancellations to public events, the decision will be made by the President, in consultation with the Alberta Health Services – Central Zone Medical Officer of Health. Students, staff and faculty would be informed via email as well as updates on The Loop (<http://theloop.rdc.ab.ca>) and external website (www.rdc.ab.ca).

WHERE CAN I FIND MORE INFORMATION?

- Alberta Health Services – www.albertahealthservices.ca
- Public Health Agency of Canada – www.phac-aspc.gc.ca
- RDC "Fight the Flu" updates – <http://theloop.rdc.ab.ca> (under the Home tab)

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