

## H1N1 Flu Virus Pandemic Guidance Document for Mass Gatherings

*Released: October 7, 2009*

***Guidance may change as provincial guidelines are released or the epidemiology of the virus evolves.***

### **Key Messages:**

- A mass gathering is a temporary collection of large numbers of people at one site or location for a common purpose.
- The H1N1 flu virus is a respiratory illness that spreads in the general population in the same manner as seasonal influenza and causes symptoms similar to those of the seasonal flu (fever and cough and one or more of the following: sore throat, muscle aches, joint pain, or weakness).
  - It is another strain of the influenza virus, and the methods to prevent and control it are the same as those for seasonal flu. Proper cough etiquette (coughing into a tissue, your sleeve, elbow or “crook” of your arm), hand washing (with soap and water or alcohol-based hand rub), staying home when ill, frequent cleaning of commonly touched surfaces, and immunization (H1N1 and seasonal flu vaccines) are the most effective ways to prevent transmission of influenza, including the H1N1 strain of influenza.
- Region of Waterloo Public Health does not recommend the cancellation of mass gatherings as a control measure to limit the spread of the H1N1 flu virus.
- It is recommended that organizers:
  - Provide liquid soap, disposable towels and/or hand-dryers in washrooms so people can practice proper hand hygiene.
  - Provide 60-90 per cent alcohol-based hand rub in locations where hand-washing facilities are not readily available, as well as consider placing them in a few high-traffic, high visibility places to promote hand hygiene.
  - Encourage staff and volunteers to practice frequent hand washing and cough and sneeze etiquette at all times, and to stay at home and not attend gatherings when they are ill.
  - Frequently clean surfaces and items commonly touched (e.g. door handles, table surfaces) to help reduce the spread of the virus. The influenza virus is easily killed by cleaning with regular household disinfectants and good cleaning practices.
  - Consider displaying posters that promote proper hand hygiene and cough etiquette to encourage appropriate infection prevention practices (Public Health has posters available to download on the Region of Waterloo Pandemic Website – [www.waterlooregionpandemic.ca](http://www.waterlooregionpandemic.ca))
- Staff and volunteers with influenza-like symptoms (fever and cough and one or more of the following: sore throat, muscle aches, joint pain, or weakness) should be advised to remain at home until they no longer have a fever and are feeling well.

### **What is H1N1?**

- The H1N1 flu virus is a respiratory illness that spreads in the general population in the same manner as seasonal influenza and causes symptoms similar to seasonal flu. **It is another strain of the influenza virus, and the methods to prevent and control it are the same as those for seasonal flu.**
- Influenza-like-illness (ILI) symptoms include: fever and cough and one or more of the following: sore throat, muscle aches, joint pain, or weakness. In children under 5, gastrointestinal symptoms may also be present and fever may not be prominent.
- H1N1 is most frequent among children, adolescents and young adults. Relatively few people over the age of 60 have become ill with H1N1.
- Measures to prevent/reduce the spread of influenza, including the H1N1 strain, include regular hand-washing, proper cough etiquette, staying at home when ill (away from school, work, and mass gatherings), and immunization (vaccine).

### **What is a mass gathering?**

- According to the Public Health Agency of Canada, a mass gathering is a temporary collection of large numbers of people at one site or location for a common purpose.
- Gatherings can be short-term (for a few hours as in a sporting event or concert) or longer (for several days to weeks as in the Olympic Games). The gathering can be held at one location or spread over different sites.

### **Considerations of mass gathering or facility closures**

- Region of Waterloo Public Health does not recommend the cancellation of mass gatherings as a control measure to limit the spread of the H1N1 flu virus.

### **Infection Prevention and Control Practices for everyone**

- Proper cough etiquette (coughing into a tissue, your sleeve, elbow or “crook” of your arm), hand washing (with soap and water or alcohol-based hand rub), staying home when ill, frequent cleaning of commonly touched surfaces, and immunization (H1N1 and seasonal flu vaccines) are the most effective ways to prevent transmission of influenza, including the H1N1 strain of influenza.

### ***Are there special instructions or guidelines for organizers of mass gatherings?***

- It is recommended that organizers:
  - Encourage people not to attend gatherings and to stay at home when they are ill.
  - Provide liquid soap, disposable towels and/or hand-dryers in washrooms so people can practice proper hand hygiene.
  - Provide 60-90 per cent alcohol-based hand rub in locations where hand-washing facilities are not readily available, as well as consider placing them in a few high-traffic, high visibility places to promote hand hygiene.
  - Encourage staff and volunteers to practice frequent hand washing and cough and sneeze etiquette at all times.
  - Frequently clean surfaces and items commonly touched (e.g. door handles, table surfaces) to help reduce the spread of the virus.
    - The influenza virus can survive for up to 48 hours on hard surfaces.
    - The influenza virus is easily killed by cleaning with regular household disinfectants and good cleaning practices.
    - No special waste handling is required for disposing of tissues, paper towels or other items used in cleaning. Waste handling should be carried out according to usual standards.
  - Consider displaying posters that promote proper hand hygiene and cough etiquette to encourage appropriate infection prevention practices (Public Health has posters available to download on the Region of Waterloo Pandemic Website – [www.waterlooregionpandemic.ca](http://www.waterlooregionpandemic.ca))

- Consider promoting key general public health messages during the event via inclusion of messages and relevant information in event handouts/brochures and making announcements at the event.
- Consider providing temporary toilet and hand washing facilities throughout the site rather than in one area, to reduce queuing.

### **Screening**

- Active screening of participants, staff, volunteers and visitors for ILI before entering the facility or gathering is not recommended.

### **Stay Home When Ill**

- Staff and volunteers with ILI symptoms should be advised to remain at home until they no longer have a fever and are feeling well.
- Volunteers who develop symptoms of ILI during the mass gathering should leave the facility as soon as possible and not return until they no longer have a fever and are feeling well.
- Some individuals may experience a cough for days to weeks after infection. Presence of a cough in the absence of other symptoms should not prevent staff or volunteers from returning to work.

### **Consultations with Public Health**

- Event planners and organizers should consult with Region of Waterloo Public Health for guidance on infection prevention and control best practices and the latest information on the H1N1 flu virus.
- Information on how individuals can protect themselves and their families, caring for sick people, and other frequently asked questions about the H1N1 flu virus can be found on Waterloo Region's pandemic website — [www.waterlooregionpandemic.ca](http://www.waterlooregionpandemic.ca).

### **For more information**

- Event planners, organizers or members of the community who have questions or want more information can call Region of Waterloo Public Health at 519-883-2000.

### **Links and resources**

Public Health Agency of Canada H1N1 flu virus website –  
<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/alert-alerte/h1n1/index-eng.php>

Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care H1N1 flu virus website –  
<http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/ccom/flu/default.aspx>

Region of Waterloo Public Health pandemic website –  
<http://www.waterlooregionpandemic.ca>