

# ASK THE DOCTORS

COLUMN

## H1N1 aka The Swine Flu”



The “Novel H1N1 Flu” virus used to be called the “Swine Flu” and Swine Influenza Virus (SIV). We wrote a column about the “swine flu” last year. We now know that the H1N1 virus is quite different than the virus that infects swine, and in June 2009 the World Health Organization signalled that “a pandemic of H1N1 is underway”.

H1N1 is a virus made up of genes found in at least three flu viruses from humans, pigs and birds – making this a very strange virus. There are currently people worldwide carrying this virus which is transmitted via coughing or sneezing. Viruses can also rest on hard surfaces like counters and doorknobs, where they can be picked up on hands and transmitted to the respiratory system via touching the mouth and/or nose. The virus is contagious from one day prior to symptoms becoming obvious until a week (or more) into the active infection.

The following are the symptoms most commonly associated with H1N1: fever, cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, chills and fatigue. Some have reported stiffness of joints, diarrhea and vomiting. In children emergency symptoms may include fast or troubled breathing, thirtlessness possibly leading to dehydration, and extreme irritability.

Currently in Canada, there are a total of 72 confirmed H1N1 cases, four of those in B.C., seven in Alberta, 23 in Ontario (Ontario has the one mortality from H1N1), and only one in Nova Scotia. This virus affects far fewer people than the annual influenza virus which accounts for approximately 1000 deaths annually in Canada. Nonetheless, precautions should be taken against H1N1 as with all viruses.

Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you sneeze. If you do not have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your jacket or sleeve in a bent arm. Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol and peroxide-based hand cleaners are also effective. Try to avoid close contact with sick people. If you get sick, stay home from school or work and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them. Generally speaking avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth (especially in sequence!).

It is prudent to ensure adequate rest. Walking and stretching exercises support the immune system (strenuous exercise and weight lifting are discouraged during these symptoms). Minimize emotions such as stress, fear and anxiety that negatively affect the immune system. A short fever of 1-2 degrees above normal (37.3°C) is the body’s way of fighting bacteria and viruses. Ensure plenty of fluids and only whole foods.

There are many naturopathic medical treatment options to optimize your immune system, and treat viral infections. If symptoms develop consult your physician for a proper work up and treatment plan.

*Yours in health, Dr’s Karen and Gurdev Parmar*

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