

Flu information for parents This year it's a different flu season

Why is this flu season different?

This fall and winter, there will be two types of flu viruses circulating – seasonal flu viruses and the new H1N1 virus.

How is H1N1 flu different from the seasonal flu?

While the viruses are different, both cause a respiratory illness with fever, cough, general unwell feeling, sore throat, runny nose and joint pain. Headache, chills, fatigue, lack of appetite may also be present. Vomiting and diarrhea sometimes occur, more often in children than adults. The illness can be mild to severe.

Who is most at risk?

High risk groups for seasonal flu include children six to 23 months, adults 65 and older, as well as people with chronic medical conditions, such as lung and heart problems.

High risk groups for H1N1 flu include pregnant women, children between six months of age and five years, people under 65 with chronic health conditions, health care workers, and household contacts and care providers of infants less than six months of age and persons who are immunocompromised.

Healthy pregnant women are not at increased risk of becoming infected with either virus, but have a higher risk of complications from flu. They should contact their health care provider as soon as possible if they become ill with flu symptoms. Likewise, people with severe symptoms, especially if they also have chronic medical problems, should contact their health care provider as soon as possible.

How does a flu virus spread?

Coughs and sneezes release the virus into the air where it can be breathed in directly by others close-by. The virus can also live on hard surfaces like counters, telephones and doorknobs for up to 48 hours. People can become infected by touching these surfaces and then touching their own eyes, mouth or nose before washing their hands.

How long can someone with the flu infect someone else?

Someone with the flu may be able to infect others the day before symptoms appear and up to seven or more days after becoming sick. A person is most infectious when symptoms begin. Once a person is well, it is rare to pass the virus to others.

When should my child stay home?

Children who are healthy are expected to follow their usual routines. If your child is sick and therefore not able to go to attend child care or school, report your child's illness to child care or school and let them know if your child has flu symptoms. Your child may return to school when feeling well again.

What can I do to help protect my child and family?

- Make a point of watching for symptoms of flu.
- If symptoms appear, keep your child at home and away from others. If you have symptoms, stay home.
- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water. Use an alcohol-based hand rub containing 60–90% alcohol if you can't wash.

Hands should be washed:

- after coughing, sneezing or blowing your nose
- after using the bathroom
- after shaking hands
- before eating and/or preparing food
- before touching your face
- before and after using shared equipment such as telephones and computers
- when you are ill, or someone you come into contact with is ill
- Sneeze or cough into your upper sleeve or disposable tissues. Dispose of tissues right away.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth unless you washed your hands immediately before.
- Clean commonly touched surfaces frequently, especially if a household member is ill. The flu virus is easily killed by regular household cleaning products.

I think my child has been in contact with someone who was ill with the flu. What do I do?

Keep watching for symptoms as usual. If your child is feeling well, there is no need to change your routines.

Are there any medications available to treat the flu?

Antiviral medications are not recommended for healthy persons who have mild illness from the flu. They may be prescribed for those with more severe illness from flu or who have a

condition that increases the risk of complications from the flu.

Will the seasonal flu vaccine protect against the H1N1 flu?

No. A seasonal flu vaccination will not protect you against the H1N1 flu virus.

Schedules for both programs will be posted on www.halton.ca once available. Watch for more information about which vaccines may be right for you.

Where can I get more information?

Information about the H1N1 flu changes as we learn more about the virus and the illness it causes. The following websites will have up to date information about both seasonal and H1N1 flu.

- **Halton Region:** www.halton.ca
- Public Health Agency of Canada: www.phac-aspc.gc.ca and www.fightflu.ca
- Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care: www.ontario.ca/flu
- Centre for Disease Control (CDC): www.cdc.gov
- World Health Organization (WHO): www.who.int

If you want to talk with someone about seasonal or H1N1 flu, please call the Halton Region Health Department at the number below or call Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000, TTY 1-866-797-0007.

Halton Region

Dial 311 or 905-825-6000
 Toll free 1-866-4HALTON (1-866-442-5866)
 TTY 905-827-9833
www.halton.ca