
From the Office of the Medical Health Officer

September 10, 2009

A back-to-school message to all Principals

Dear Principal,

Besides the usual excitement and challenges of the return to school, this fall brings with it the possibility of renewed H1N1 (human swine) flu activity. Although a vaccine against this new strain of influenza will be available by the end of November in Canada, we may see increased activity of the virus before then.

This note is to give you a brief overview of the public health recommendations for limiting the spread of this virus both now and after the vaccine becomes available. They reflect the fact that, in most aspects, H1N1 resembles our usual seasonal influenza very closely.

To prevent the spread of H1N1, three elements are most important:

- Frequent hand washing with soap and water
- Early identification and self-isolation of sick people (i.e. not coming to school if sick and leaving school if you fall ill while there)
- "Cough" or "respiratory" etiquette

As for the vaccine, there will be enough for all who need and want it. Detailed immunization plans, which will likely involve mass-vaccination at school, will depend on the exact recommendations the federal government makes this fall. The schedules of regular school vaccine programmes may have to be adjusted to take the H1N1 vaccine campaign into account.

School closures do **not** feature in the control measures; at this point in the pandemic they would provide no benefit and cause much social disruption.

Information to support schools, teachers, parents, and students are available on the web at:
<http://www.gov.bc.ca/h1n1/backtoschool/index.html>



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