

H1N1 Preparedness and Response

Toronto Prep School is committed to protecting the health and well being of all our students and staff. We have adopted the same response procedures as has the Toronto District School Board as dictated to us by Toronto Public Health officials. As part of our response to the H1N1 outbreak, we continue to focus on pandemic preparedness and will adapt our response as the situation changes. We will continue to monitor the situation and provide updates on new developments to staff, students and parents when necessary.

What is Influenza? [Source: *Toronto Pandemic Influenza Planning Guide for Schools*]

Influenza, commonly known as “the flu,” is a highly contagious respiratory illness caused by a virus. The vast majority of influenza is transmitted from person to person by droplet spread via sneezing, coughing, talking or direct contact such as shaking hands or kissing. The period of communicability is believed to be from 24 hours before and up to 3 to 5 days after symptoms develop. Children and some adults may be infectious for 7 or more days after the onset of symptoms. The incubation period is 1 to 3 days. According to public health information, about half of the influenza infections are without symptoms, with the other half showing a range of symptoms from mild to severe.

Symptoms include:

- *Sudden onset of fever, headache, chills, muscle aches, physical exhaustion and a dry cough.*
- *Subsequent onset of sore throat, stuffy or runny nose and worsening cough.*
- *Children may also feel sick to their stomach, vomit or have diarrhea.*
- *Elderly and immune comprised people may not develop a fever.*
- *Most people recover in 7 to 10 days*

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

(Recommended by Toronto Public Health)

What is influenza?

Influenza, the flu, is caused by a specific virus that typically comes around each fall or winter. People who get the flu usually have an abrupt onset of fever, headache, chills, muscle aches, physical exhaustion, cough, sore throat and runny or stuffy nose. Children may also feel sick to their stomach, vomit or have diarrhea.

What is Pandemic Influenza?

An influenza pandemic occurs when there is an abrupt and major change in the protein structure of the Influenza A virus resulting, in a new strain. Because people have little or no immunity to this new strain, it can spread quickly, causing outbreaks in one or more countries or worldwide. This is called a pandemic.

How often do flu pandemics occur?

Flu pandemics have historically occurred three or four times each century. There were three flu pandemics in the last century (1918, 1957 and 1968).

Can a pandemic be prevented at an early stage?

Efforts will be made internationally to control a pandemic at an early stage. However, flu is highly contagious and because whole populations will be susceptible to the new virus, it is not considered possible to halt the spread of a pandemic.

How will we know if a pandemic has started?

The World Health Organization and certain countries have large surveillance programs to monitor and detect influenza activity around the world, including the emergence of potential pandemic strains. The WHO will declare the beginning of a pandemic. The Public Health Agency of Canada and the provincial Ministry of Health and Long term Care will declare the beginning of the pandemic period in Canada and Ontario, respectively.

How will we know the pandemic flu has reached Canada/Ontario/Toronto?

Canada has developed an influenza surveillance system which is comprised of laboratory-based influenza virus identification, reporting of influenza-like illness by sentinel physicians across the country and reporting of influenza activity by provincial and territorial epidemiologists. Local and provincial public health jurisdictions may also undertake additional surveillance measures. This information will help identify pandemic influenza as early as possible.

How will the pandemic flu spread to Canada?

Most likely this will occur when a person ill with the disease in an affected part of the world travels to Canada and develops symptoms here.

Will people be prevented from traveling?

If a pandemic starts outside of Canada, people are likely to be advised not to travel to affected areas or attend international gatherings such as large conferences and sporting events. Depending on how the pandemic develops, it may be necessary to reduce the movement of people within Canada to delay spread of the disease.

Who will be at risk during a flu pandemic?

Everyone is potentially at risk of becoming ill during an influenza pandemic. Certain groups may be at greater risk than others but that will not be known until the pandemic virus emerges.

How long will the pandemic last?

Based on the last two pandemics, it is estimated that the next pandemic will arrive in Canada within three months of emerging in another part of the world. However, it may arrive much sooner because of global air travel.

What are antiviral drugs?

Antiviral drugs are used for the prevention or treatment of some viral infections. These drugs destroy a virus or interfere with its ability to grow and reproduce. When used for prevention, people must take the medication for as long as they are exposed to the virus. When used for treatment, infected people receive the drug to reduce symptoms, shorten the length of illness and minimize serious complications. Antiviral medications must be taken within 48 hours of the first symptoms of influenza to be effective.

PREVENTION AND EDUCATION

- Preventive hand-washing and cough etiquette campaigns
- Messages for students, staff, and parents
- Procedure for environmental cleaning of school and workplaces
- Training for food services staff and custodial staff for enhanced infection control techniques

Toronto Public Health has advised the following with regard to prevention, education and cleaning workplaces in the *Toronto Pandemic Influenza Plan - A Planning Guide for Schools, March 2007*.

Practise hand hygiene

Clean your hands frequently with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer or soap and water, especially after you cough, sneeze, or blow your nose. A 60 to 90% alcohol-based hand sanitizer is the preferred agent for hand hygiene unless your hands are visibly soiled. If your hands are visibly soiled, you should wash them with soap and water. If you are not near water and your hands are visibly soiled, clean your hands with a moist towelette to remove visible debris, and then use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. The influenza virus is easily killed by soap, hand wash or hand sanitizer products. Therefore gloves or special antibacterial hand wash products are not needed. Hand washing/sanitizing is a very important method to prevent the spread of pandemic influenza.

Hand washing procedure

- Wet hands.
- Apply soap.
- Lather for 15 seconds. Rub between fingers, back of hands, fingertips, under nails.
- Rinse well under running water.
- Dry hands well with paper towel or hot air blower.
- Turn taps off with paper towel, if available.

Hand sanitizing procedure

- Apply sanitizer (minimum 60% alcohol-based).
- Rub hands together.
- Work the sanitizer between fingers, the back of hands, fingertips, under nails.
- Rub hands until dry.

Practise respiratory etiquette

People should be encouraged to cover their mouth and nose when they cough or sneeze. This will help stop the spread of germs that can make people sick. It is important to keep your distance (e.g., more than one metre/three feet) from people who are coughing or sneezing, if possible.

Cover your cough procedure

- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough, sneeze or blow your nose.
- Put used tissues into the waste basket.
- If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your sleeve, not in your hands.
- Wash your hands with soap and water or hand sanitizer (minimum 60% alcohol-based).

Avoid touching your eyes, mouth and nose

Influenza spreads when the infected respiratory secretions from the mouth or nose of one person come into contact with the mucous membranes (mouth, nose or eyes) of another person. Without even realizing it, you may touch the

infected nose and mouth secretions of someone who has influenza (e.g., by shaking hands). If you go on to touch your mouth, nose or eyes, the influenza virus may gain entry into your body causing infection.

Stay home if you are ill

Most adults infected with influenza can transmit the virus from 24 hours before and up to five days after they begin to experience symptoms. For some adults and for young children, this period may last for seven or more days. Some experts believe that people are most infectious in the first three days after they are infected with influenza. However there are no clear data on how long a person should wait before returning to work or school to minimize the risk of infecting others. The best advice at this time is that adults should not return to their usual activities for at least five days after they begin to experience influenza symptoms (seven days for young children) or when they feel well enough to return to their duties, whichever is longer. It should be made clear that employees must not come into work when they have influenza-like symptoms. If an employee develops influenza-like symptoms while at work they should immediately leave the workplace.

Use of masks

The use of masks is a difficult and unresolved issue. According to the Canadian Pandemic Influenza Plan, there is no evidence that the use of masks in public will protect an individual from infection when the influenza virus is circulating widely in the community. However a person wearing a mask properly at the time of exposure to influenza may benefit from the barrier that a mask provides. Toronto City Council has urged the federal and provincial ministers of health to give further consideration to the wearing of masks in situations where potential exposure to infectious individuals is unavoidable.

Closure Decisions

In a severe pandemic emergency, school closures may be required. This could be to reduce the possibility of infection, because there is insufficient staff to supervise students or there are other situations that would result in a closure. The following is the statement on school closures from the Toronto Pandemic Influenza Plan - A Planning Guide for Schools March 2007

Settings where children gather face particular infection prevention and control challenges because children shed virus longer than adults and because children (particularly young children) may not be capable of implementing some practices independently (e.g., hand washing, using tissues).

According to the Ontario Health Pandemic Influenza Plan (September 2006), public health officials may recommend school closures prior to or during a pandemic, especially if the novel virus strain preferentially affects school-aged children or causes unusually severe illness in this age group. If schools are closed it would likely be done early in the pandemic in order to have the greatest possible benefit.

The decision to close Toronto schools would be made by the Medical Officer of Health in consultation with the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, Ministry of Education, neighbouring jurisdictions and affected school boards. School boards should identify other situations that could result in school closures, (e.g., insufficient number of staff).

Toronto Prep School will follow the direction of Toronto Public Health regarding school closures.