

May1, 2009

Dear Fellow Nova Scotians:

I'd like to provide you with an update on the province's efforts in dealing with HINI (human swine influenza). You are receiving this update because we have identified you, or the people and organizations you serve, as a key stakeholder who will require information and updates as we move forward.

Public health professionals, in partnership with all district health authorities across Nova Scotia, continue to monitor and respond to HINI (human swine influenza). Nova Scotia has a strong public health system, with highly skilled and caring professionals, and I am confident in our ability to manage this issue.

Public Health offices across the province are getting many inquiries from workplaces, schools, universities, daycares, long-term care facilities, doctors, pharmacists, dentists, physiotherapist, travelers and many others. If you do not have symptoms, it is important to remember that daily activities should continue as normal. It is safe to go to school, work and socialize. Symptoms to watch for include fever and cough in combination with fatigue, headache and sore throat.

Fortunately, the confirmed cases of HINI (human swine influenza) in Nova Scotia to date have been mild, with no need for hospitalization. I fully expect the virus to spread, and when it does, we can expect to see more severe cases develop. We will continue to use our established public health practices and our network of health professionals to manage any additional cases of HINI (human swine influenza) in the province.

If you have influenza-like symptoms, and have recently traveled to an area affected by HINI (human swine influenza), like Mexico, or have been in contact with someone who has HINI (human swine influenza), it is important to avoid close contact with others for seven days after your symptoms start. This is the time when the illness can be spread to others. Stay home from work, school, public places and avoid social settings. Minimize contact with family members as much as possible. Like any illness, should your symptoms worsen, visit your doctor or a walk-in clinic and be sure to mention your travel history.

We do not recommend the use of masks by the general population, as they have not been proven effective in reducing the risk of infection. Furthermore, we do not recommend the use of anti-virals such as Tamiflu for treating mild illness or for prevention.

If you are experiencing influenza-like symptoms, but have not been exposed to HINI (human swine influenza), treat it as you would normal seasonal influenza. Stay home, rest and drink plenty of fluids. If it gets worse, again, see a doctor.

You should also be aware that the Public Health Agency of Canada has issued a travel advisory urging all travelers to postpone non-essential travel to Mexico until further notice. Those who will be traveling to an affected area, and have not received an influenza shot, are advised to get one.

This is an evolving situation and the information we are providing to you on H1N1 (human swine influenza) is likely to change. Media will receive updates, mid-afternoon on a daily basis. As well, I will share new information with you as it becomes available. I would ask you to please share this information with your staff, and your stakeholders, through your regular communication channels.

I have enclosed a fact sheet and questions and answers that might be helpful. You can also find updates and information about what we're doing to protect the health and safety of Nova Scotians at www.gov.ns.ca/hpp.

Remember, prevention continues to be the best approach to avoid illness. Nova Scotians are advised to wash their hands thoroughly and often, cough into their sleeves and stay away from the public if they are sick.

If you have any questions, comments or concerns, please send an email to healthpromotion@gov.ns.ca

Best regards,

Dr. Robert Strang
Chief Public Health Officer
Province of Nova Scotia