



## Beausoleil Family Health Centre

H1N1 (Swine Flu) Update  
June 17, 2009

Dear Chimnissing:

There is much talk in the news and elsewhere about the H1N1 virus and in particular about one First Nation community in Manitoba - St. Theresa Point First Nation and now also Sandy Lake, Ontario as well.

In an effort to keep you well and accurately informed, I would like to give you some factual information that I have received from Health Canada via a teleconference yesterday with our Community Medicine Specialist – Dr. Lillian Yuan. You can also get accurate and up-to-date information at [www.pandemic.knet.ca](http://www.pandemic.knet.ca) . This is the official pandemic information site for Health Canada.

In this letter I will address:

- Who the World Health Organization is
- The current situation
- The current recommendations regarding personal care – both if you are well, and if you develop flu like symptoms
- The current recommendations regarding travel, mass gatherings, pow-wow attendance etc.

### **The World Health Organization (WHO) – who are they? And what do they do?**

The World Health Organization is “the directing and coordinating authority for health within the United Nations system”. It is responsible for providing leadership on global health matters, shaping the health research agenda, setting norms and standards, articulating evidence-based policy options, providing technical support to countries and monitoring and assessing health trends.”

### **What does that mean?**

They are responsible for monitoring the health status of countries across the globe and providing evidence-based direction, recommendations, and support for addressing these threats.

## H1N1 - The current situation:

On June 11, 2009, the WHO declared a global pandemic (level 6) which means that a particular virus has caused sustained community level outbreaks in two or more countries in one WHO region (i.e. the Americas) as well as in at least one other country in another WHO region (i.e. Europe, the Australias, etc) (WHO document <http://www.who.int/csr/disease/influenza/GIPA3AideMemoire.pdf>).

I want to emphasize that this declaration of a pandemic is about the *sustained transmission or spread of the virus from human to human* and **not** about the *severity* of the virus. These two issues must be kept separate because **a pandemic can be declared regardless of severity**. And just because at this particular time the threat is only moderate, does not mean it will be the same with future situations. Therefore it is important to remember that severity is a very changeable matter - please gauge your movements and intensity of concern based on the reporting of *severity* rather than the pandemic level.

At this time, this particular virus is considered 'moderate' in nature, with the majority of cases being considered mild and able to recover at home without medical treatment. The most frequent population to be affected seems to be those who are under 30 years of age. Although there is speculation about the reason for this, at present there is no established rationale for why this age group is more greatly affected.

Efforts are currently underway to develop a vaccine for this virus and may be available as early as this fall.

According to the WHO, as of June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2009, there have been 35,928 cases confirmed in 76 countries and 163 deaths. In Canada there have been 2974 confirmed cases and 4 deaths. To put this in perspective, the seasonal flu had 250,000 cases with 4,000 deaths.

So it is important to note that although a pandemic has been declared by the WHO, each individual country (and in our case province, municipality, and community) has to gauge their own particular situation and decide whether or not to declare an emergency. Neither Canada, nor the province of Ontario has declared an emergency regarding this situation at this time.

## Personal Care:

The virus has the ability to mutate, and as it continues to spread, the situation may change to a more severe variety, so it is a good idea to get in the habit of good personal protective practices.

These include:

- Washing your hands frequently with either soap and water or with hand sanitizer (the number one best way to protect yourself and others)
- Coughing into the crook of your elbow (best choice) or a tissue (second choice) rather than your bare hand
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth (this is often how we become ill)
- Influenza is a 'droplet' born virus and so the high risk zone is within 6 feet of an infected person. Therefore avoid close contact (closer than 6 feet) with people who appear to be unwell;
- And eating healthy foods, being well rested, and exercising regularly – the healthier you are the better you can fight off illness.

If you become ill with Influenza, in order to protect others and reduce the spread:

- PLEASE Self-Isolate – this means choosing to stay away from public places when you have the flu.

**SYMPTOMS** of influenza are:

- fever of greater than 38°C
  - fatigue (weak & tired)
  - lack of appetite
  - new or worse cough
  - and sore throat.
  - Some people with H1N1 influenza have also reported vomiting and diarrhea)
- Cleanse the surfaces of your living area daily when you or someone in your home is ill
  - It is important to self-isolate (this includes being off work) for at least 7 days from the onset of symptoms or 48 hours after they have ceased – whichever is **longer** – you are CONTAGIOUS for this length of time and can pass the virus along to others.

## Large Gatherings and Travel ~ It's Pow-Wow season – can I still go?

If you apply the personal care practices listed above and **do not have influenza**, there are currently no recommendations to restrict personal travel.

However, it is important for you to use your own best judgement in deciding about non-essential travel to known areas of outbreaks such as is currently being experienced in Sandy Lake FN in Northern Ontario and St. Theresa's Point in Manitoba. If it is not essential to go, it is better to avoid these areas until the outbreak has been cleared especially if you have a pre-existing underlying medical condition (such as lung disease or diabetes) that would make you more vulnerable to this type of illness.

The most recent update given by Dr. Lillian Yuan yesterday regarding these two First Nations is:

**St. Theresa's Point:** It is believed that the illness that was circulating through St. Theresa's Point was something other than H1N1 because the severity was not in keeping with what has been typical of H1N1, and of those who became ill only 3 were in the end confirmed to be actual cases of H1N1.

**Sandy Lake:** It has not yet been determined if the cases from Sandy Lake originated through contact with St. Theresa's Point, but because of their outbreak, Sandy Lake has decided to close their local school and cancel any planned mass gatherings (i.e. church, pow-wow, bingo etc) and the cases are being managed with the antiviral 'Tamiflu'.

I hope you find this information helpful in guiding your self-care and decisions.

If you would like more information on the current situation, here are a few other reliable websites you may refer to:

The World Health Organization: <http://www.who.int/en/>

Health Canada: <http://hc-sc.gc.ca/index-eng.php>

Public Health Agency of Canada: <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/index-eng.php>

Be well!

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