

H1N1 Influenza Pandemic Information Update #7:

October 5, 2009

Is this the new norm?

Since the **World Health Organization (WHO)** declared a full **Pandemic Alert** in June of this year, countries around the world have grappled with the questions, demands and responses required of such a heightened state of alert. For many public health officials, the greatest challenge of the H1N1 Influenza pandemic is the growing complacency of society and the exhaustion of public health workers and emergency planners who are trying to anticipate the full impact of the H1N1 virus.

A Quick Recap:

In declaring a Phase Six Pandemic Alert, the World health Organization (WHO) was alerting governments around the world who had not already done so to activate their national pandemic plans because scientific evidence was showing that the H1N1 virus was spreading faster and more aggressively around the globe than was the norm for influenza viruses. It was also urging drug makers to speed up research leading to the production of an H1N1-related vaccine.

In response, the Federal and Provincial Governments of Canada activated their pandemic plans. These plans have remained active since June 2009. At that time, the Diocesan Pandemic Response Plan was also activated. This plan is available on the Diocesan website at www.toronto.anglican.ca/emergencypreparedness .

As of September 20th, 2009, WHO reported **318,925 confirmed cases of H1N1 influenza** around the world with **3917 deaths** related to the virus.

As of August 29th, 2009, Public Health Canada reported **6676 confirmed cases** of H1N1 influenza.

As of September 23rd, 2009, Ontario reported **4,075 confirmed cases, 24 deaths and 373 hospitalizations** related to the H1N1 virus. Ontario and Quebec have the highest rates of H1N1 influenza infection in Canada.

Dr. Margaret Chan, Director General of WHO, continues to remind us that:

- this H1N1 influenza virus is unique and has never circulated within human populations before;
- because of its international spread, any form of travel restrictions or efforts to quarantine populations would be ineffective;
- this virus is spreading under a close and careful international watch;
- the overwhelming majority of persons infected experience only mild symptoms and recover quickly.

As we approach this year's flu season every household in Ontario will have received a public health information pamphlet entitled: *This year it's a different Flu season*, www.health.gov.on.ca highlighting what each of us can do to prepare for this year's flu season.

Unfortunately, uncertainty continues to surround the vaccine for the H1N1 virus. While there is assurance that there will be sufficient supplies of the vaccine, the schedule for distribution and the sequence of availability remains subject to change. On September 16th, 2009, Public Health Canada issued guidelines on H1N1 vaccine sequencing (or scheduling). Priorities as to who are first to being vaccinated are based upon the growing global experience of the H1N1 influenza pandemic. Details as to this schedule of priorities can be accessed at www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/alert-alerte/h1n1/vacc/vacc-eng.php.

The decision whether or not to get vaccinated will always remain the responsibility of the individual. Clergy must always encourage parishioners to consult with their own family doctor when making such an important decision.

Previous pandemic updates have highlighted the basics of health care precautions necessary during this flu season. In summary, they are:;

- **As of April 30th the practice of intinction is prohibited.**
- In response to the pastoral needs of the worried well, communion in one kind is an acceptable tradition within the Anglican Church.
- Social distancing should NOT be discouraged and that *the exchange of the peace* can be accomplished with a simple nod of acknowledgement.
- Basic hygiene regarding the “sleeve sneeze”, washing of hands and the use of hand sanitizers is encouraged (*posters regarding these practices were mailed to each parish on June 5th, additional posters are available through the office of the Coordinator of Chaplaincy Services*).
- Follow the Influenza Pandemic Response Plan, Appendix D, Liturgical Conduct, page 17 for information regarding hygienic protocols.

New Information: Recently additional information helpful to parishes has been published by Public Health Canada.

As regards mass or public gatherings such as worship services or parish meetings, the Public Health Agency of Canada issued guidelines regarding risk assessment and event planning. These guidelines include:

Risk Assessment: *Event planners and other stakeholders should work in close collaboration with local public health officials when planning events, taking into account local factors while conducting a risk assessment of the event. Conducting a risk assessment of a planned event will assist event planners, stakeholders, and local public*

health officials to determine if an event should be cancelled, modified, or postponed.
Factors to consider when conducting a risk assessment of an event include:

1. the morbidity and mortality of the pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza virus illness within the community;
2. the target audience of the mass gathering (e.g., children, seniors, local vs. international);
3. the size and duration of the event;
4. the types of transportation that will be used, if the event includes transportation, and the degree of isolation from medical attention (e.g., cars vs. buses);
5. the types of accommodation that will be used by event attendees (e.g., individual hotel rooms vs. dormitory style, tents or billeting arrangements);
6. the purpose of the mass gathering and the potential political, social, cultural and economic impacts of cancelling the event;
7. the season the event is to be held in and the type of venue (e.g., an outdoor summer event vs. an indoor winter event); and
8. the ability of the event organizer to provide adequate hygiene & sanitation facilities.

Event Planning: To help mitigate the spread of **influenza-like-illnesses (ILI)** during an event, public health officials can provide guidance to event organizers regarding:

1. The importance of providing information prior to the event on:
 - the signs and symptoms of influenza-like-illnesses (ILI);
 - the importance of attendees to stay home if ill with symptoms of ILI;
 - the potential for the spread of ILI at such events; and
 - proper hand hygiene, cough & sneeze etiquette.
2. The promotion of key general public health messages (e.g., hand hygiene, cough and sneeze etiquette, not to share cups, cigarettes, etc.) during the event via the display of posters at the event, inclusion of relevant information in event brochures, and making announcements at the event;
3. The importance of planning for the safe assessment of people who become ill with symptoms of ILI at the event and a mechanism for isolating ill attendees or safely transporting ill attendees from the site;
4. The importance of, and how to consult with public health authorities if clusters of ILI are identified at events with a longer duration, (e.g., a few days or more);
5. The importance of providing hand wash stations throughout the event venue and in a manner that will help encourage hand cleaning;
6. The importance of ensuring a constant supply of soap and paper towels for hand washing purposes and providing advice (e.g., include posters at hand wash stations) regarding correct hand cleaning procedure);
7. The benefits of locating temporary toilet and hand washing facilities, if used, throughout the site rather than in one area, to reduce queuing;
8. The use of alcohol based rub stations to supplement (or in lieu of) hand washing stations and information (e.g., posters) showing correct hand cleaning procedures at alcohol based rub stations;

9. *The importance of ensuring that tissues and closed waste receptacles are located throughout the venue and that posters promoting hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette are visible in order to encourage appropriate infection prevention practices;*
10. *The importance of frequent cleaning, using routine cleaning products, of high-touch areas (e.g., washroom facilities, handrails, door knobs etc.);*
11. *The importance of frequent emptying of waste receptacles - no special waste handling is required for influenza. Waste handling should be carried out according to usual standards; and*
12. *The importance of, and how to, contact local public health or health protection offices for information on food safety and sanitation issues at mass gathering events. Information on food safety information can also be found at the following web link: <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/fs-sa/index-eng.php>.*

The full document outlining the above can be accessed at:
[www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/alert-alerte/h1n1/phg-1dp-eng.php?](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/alert-alerte/h1n1/phg-1dp-eng.php)

New Information: Regarding faith communities and the role they can play this flu season, the Public Health Agency of Canada suggests;

Faith-Based Organizations/Settings: *It is recommended that faith-based organizations consider how the guidance provided (by public health authorities) may apply to their settings and to determine if there may be a need to temporarily modify some faith based practices in an effort to prevent **influenza-like-illnesses** (ILI) transmission within their settings, especially when influenza is circulating in their community.*

Additionally, faith-based organizations can contribute to public health efforts to prevent the transmission of influenza. Through their extensive networks, they can provide a venue to communicate key influenza prevention messages and, through their outreach programs, may also provide additional assistance such as flu buddies¹ who can check on vulnerable individuals within their communities.

The full document outlining the above can be accessed at:
www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/alert-alerte/h1n1/hp-ps-info_health-sante-eng.php?option=print

Additional information regarding the approaching flu season and suggested precautions can be accessed through the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-term Care at www.health.gov.on.ca/en/ccom/flu/ .

¹ **Flu Buddies:** In a parish setting flu buddies would be parishioners who keep in touch with each other, especially elderly or single parishioners. For example, if a regular mid-week service member fails to attend, the flu buddy would check in with that person. Or, flu buddies could simply keep in regular contact with each other during the flu season.

What can we reasonably expect? This is probably the most urgent and most difficult question to answer. Public health officials cannot predict with absolute certainty the severity of this second wave of H1N1 influenza nor the length and complexity of this flu season. However, it is reasonable to plan for the following;

- 1) Continue to follow protocols regarding worship as outlined by the Diocesan Pandemic Response Plan and protocols regarding contagion and the common cup. www.toronto.anglican.ca/emergencypreparedness .
- 2) Make the healthy practices of the “sleeve sneeze”, the washing of hands and the use of hand sanitizer a regular aspect of parish life.
- 3) Review with parish tenants, (especially child care centers) their H1N1 and regular flu season preparations.
- 4) Include H1N1 precautions when planning youth or senior related events. Populations with high risk vulnerability to H1N1 infection include ages 6 months to 40 and seniors over 65.
- 5) Plan for above average work related absences due to infection or the worried well. Public health officials suggest that up to 30% of the work force may be absent from work due to illness, the need to tend to ill family members or those anxious to go to work. Such absences will have both human resource and financial implications for the work and life of the parish.

For reliable and up-to-date information regarding the H1N1 Influenza Pandemic, visit;
World health Organization @ www.who.int
Public Health Ontario @ www.publichealthontario.ca

Previous pandemic updates are available on the Diocesan website;
www.toronto.anglican.ca/emergencypreparedness.

Future Pandemic Updates will be issued as significant events occur. For additional information regarding the H1N1 Influenza Pandemic, please contact;

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