

H1N1 Influenza Frequently Asked Questions November 4, 2009

When will school children receive the vaccine?

The Department of Health and Community Services and regional health authorities are working to deliver the H1N1 vaccination program based on national vaccine availability. For the most current information on the H1N1 vaccination program visit: www.gov.nl.ca/health or Regional Health Authority websites:

Eastern Health www.easternhealth.ca
Central Health www.centralhealth.nl.ca
Western Health www.westernhealth.nl.ca
Labrador Grenfell Health www.lghealth.ca

Toll free information lines are also available:
Department of Health and Community Services: 1-888-729-0144
Eastern Health 1-877-752-4358
Central Health 1-877-311-2613
Western Health 1-877- 632-H1N1(4161)
Labrador-Grenfell Health 1-877-896-0422

The children in identified high risk groups have been receiving their vaccine at one of the public clinics. Immunizations for all other school-aged children will begin as the vaccine supply becomes available. This is being monitored daily.

Where will school children receive the vaccine?

Wherever possible and feasible, health authorities will take steps to provide the vaccine to students in their school. This may not be possible in every instance. Each regional health authority is developing a plan for school-based immunizations. Parents do have the option to have their child vaccinated through the mass immunization program. If children are absent during the school-based vaccinations, parents will need to take their child to the public clinic.

Do parents need to be present when their child receives the vaccine in schools?

It is not necessary for parents to be present for the vaccination. Schools are following the usual procedures for any school-based immunizations, where it is feasible and effective to do so.

Parents were asked to complete the consent form and return it to school today. However, in some cases, it may be some time before the vaccination will occur. Why was the form sent out at this time?

It's anticipated that it will take several days to gather consent forms from parents. Therefore this process was started immediately so that when the vaccine supply dictates the school immunizations can begin consent from parents is already in place.

The information collected from parents will provide a good estimate of the number of children who request to receive the vaccine. This will ensure that a sufficient number of doses are available and will help inform the scheduling.

On the consent form that parents received, they were asked to indicate if their child was sick or have a fever today. Since the date for the vaccination is unknown, how will the school know whether or not a child should receive the vaccine on the actual day of vaccination?

Schools will be provided the schedule and will be able to advise parents of the exact date that each grade level in a school will receive the vaccine. Children who are sick or who have a fever should not attend school. If a child is absent from school during the school-based immunization period, the child can receive the vaccination at a public clinic.

The form that went home stated two vaccines for children under 10. If a child has a chronic condition and has already received the vaccine will they get the other in school and do parents need to sign the consent form?

If the child already received their first dose of vaccine at a mass immunization clinic then the parent should NOT sign the consent. The regional health authorities have a record on those children with a chronic condition and will be calling parents to schedule an appointment for their second dose at a clinic. This will allow parents of children with chronic conditions to be present for the vaccination as they were when the first dose was administered.

Should schools be closed because of the H1N1 virus?

There is no plan at this time to close schools. Schools are asked to continue with their regular routine to the extent possible. Health officials advise that closing schools will not

contain the spread of the flu as the virus is community-based; it is not restricted to school communities.

The Department is meeting with the school district directors each day and is monitoring the attendance of students, teachers and support staff. If there are particular schools that can no longer function, then the decision to close or not will be made based on the situation present in that school.

Is there a certain threshold of absenteeism that would determine closure?

There is no threshold as every school is unique and has different circumstances that may require an individual response.

For example, some schools may have high teacher absenteeism but a large pool of substitutes to provide instruction to students. Other schools may not have this resource to draw upon but may have the ability to combine classes.

Each district has a plan in place to address student, teacher and support staff absenteeism. These plans include alternate student groupings, alternate schedules, increased use of online resources and staff re-assignment.

Should parents keep children at home?

If your child is sick, then it is recommended that your child stay home. Otherwise, it is not recommended to keep children at home. The emphasis on clean, cover and contain continues as well as the focus on cleaning in the schools.

What are schools doing to address loss of instructional time due to high absenteeism?

School districts and schools have developed plans to address teacher and student absenteeism including preparing online support materials and unit plans for home study. For public exam courses, there are resources available through CDLI that all students may access.

The length of absenteeism for an individual student is approximately one week and therefore, the amount of catch-up a student requires when returning to class is manageable.

With the increase in the spread of the virus and increased absenteeism, what can be done to help limit the spread of the H1N1 virus?

The three messages Clean, Cover, and Contain must continue to be highlighted. Frequent hand washing with soap and water, supplementary use of hand sanitizers, covering coughs and sneezes, keeping hands away from the face, and staying home

when experiencing flu-like symptoms are still recommended as the best approach to limiting the spread.

Why have some activities been temporarily postponed yet others have not?

Events that require students to travel outside their home community have been suspended until November 13, 2009. This is to help reduce the risk of spreading the virus. For events taking place in the schools, continuing extra-curricular and co-curricular activities would not impact the risk of spreading the virus. Districts are using their discretion based on student attendance and are reducing the level of activity when there is a possibility of spreading the virus.

Will activities resume November 14th?

This will depend on the status of attendance in schools at that time. Attendance is being monitored on a daily basis and this data will be used to determine if the risk to students is increased with regional events taking place.