

# Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care

## Guidance for Management of Patients with Influenza-like Illness (ILI) in Ambulatory Settings

Please refer to Important Health Notice Volume 6, Issue 10 issued on May 19, 2009

Information as of May 19, 2009 indicates that the current H1N1 influenza virus has characteristics similar to seasonal influenza<sup>1</sup> (clinical features, morbidity and mortality, epidemiology). However, because it is a novel virus with pandemic potential, these guidelines are precautionary and will be updated as new information and evidence becomes available.

Ambulatory settings may include, but are not limited to, physician offices and clinics, diagnostic imaging, and lab collection services, and allied health professional services.

The current H1N1 influenza A virus has been identified in both travelers to affected areas as well as the local community. The presence of the virus in the community and associated transmission from person-to-person suggests that H1N1 should be assumed to be one of the predominant circulating strains of influenza at this time.

This has been issued to update the previous information provided and should be used as the most current guidance for the management of ILI in the clinical setting.

### Background

The Ontario Health Plan for an Influenza Pandemic (OHPIP) advises that it is prudent to wear fit tested N95 respirators while within 2 metres of caring for a patient with an influenza virus of pandemic

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<sup>1</sup> Influenza is predominantly a droplet-borne disease; however transmission via small airborne sized particles cannot be ruled out. Influenza virus can also survive on surfaces; therefore, both droplet and contact precautions are recommended to prevent transmission.

potential. Because travel history can no longer accurately predict who is infected with the novel H1N1 strain, it follows that a fit tested N95 respirator in addition to droplet and contact precautions should be used by healthcare workers when within 2 metres of caring for all patients with influenza-like illness(ILI).

The recommendations outlined are based upon implementation of the broadest level of precautionary measures. Where supplies of N95 respirators and other personal protective equipment (PPE) are limited or depleted, N95 respirator and PPE use by healthcare workers should be prioritized as recommended in chapter 7 of the OHPIP. If an N95 respirator is not available, healthcare workers are advised to don a surgical mask wherever an N95 respirator is called for in this document and, if possible, to put a surgical mask on their patient.

Individuals who meet the symptom criteria for ILI should self-isolate and not present to their work setting. The length of time the individual should remain off work will depend on their work setting (see Patient Disposition and Treatment for advice in the non-healthcare and healthcare settings).

General information on infection control practices in ambulatory settings can be found at:  
[http://www.cpso.on.ca/uploadedFiles/policies/guidelines/office/Infection\\_Controlv2.pdf](http://www.cpso.on.ca/uploadedFiles/policies/guidelines/office/Infection_Controlv2.pdf)

## 1. Screening

*Passive:* All settings should have signage posted (available at: [http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/public/updates/archives/hu\\_09/provider/default.html](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/public/updates/archives/hu_09/provider/default.html)) requesting any patient with a new/worsening cough or respiratory illness to perform hand hygiene and don a surgical mask.

*Active:* Patients should also be actively triaged/screened using the 'Screening Tool for Influenza-like Illness (ILI)' (available at: [http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/public/updates/archives/hu\\_09/provider/default.html](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/public/updates/archives/hu_09/provider/default.html)). Where applicable, these screening questions should be asked at the time the patient telephones to book an appointment. The patient can then be informed of the need to don a mask immediately upon arrival to the office. Masks and alcohol-based hand rub should be available at all entrances.

## 2. Patient Management

All patients who present with ILI (see definition below) should be managed as follows:

- Physical barrier (i.e. window or plexiglass barrier) or the receptionist should maintain a 2 metre (6 foot) distance from all patients whenever possible<sup>2</sup>. In settings where such a separation is not possible, healthcare workers are advised to maintain whatever separation is feasible.
- If there is no barrier, and a 2 metre (6 foot) distance cannot be achieved, a fit tested N95 respirator and eye protection should be worn by the receptionist
- Alcohol-based hand rub (ABHR) should be readily available for both staff and patients
- Patient should be asked to perform hand hygiene using an ABHR and given a surgical mask to put on covering their nose and mouth
- Patient should be placed in a separate area of the office (i.e. examination room). If an examination room or separate room is not available, the patient should remain masked.

<sup>2</sup> This is a precautionary measure as the incremental benefit of maintaining a 2 metre separation from influenza patients is unknown.

*Routine Practices should be used consistently with all patients including:*

- Hand hygiene before and after all patient contact
- Appropriate use of personal protective equipment (e.g. gloves, gowns, eye protection) for contact with all patient secretions/excretions as per Routine Practices (see CPSO link above)
- Appropriate disinfection of all equipment which is shared between patients
- Cleaning/disinfection of all patient contact surfaces after patient leaves the examining room

## Influenza-like Illness (ILI)

Acute onset of respiratory illness with fever and cough and with one or more of the following: sore throat, arthralgia, myalgia, or prostration, which could be due to influenza virus. In children under 5 years of age, gastrointestinal symptoms may also be present. In patients aged under 5 years or 65 and older fever may not be prominent.

## Infection Prevention and Control for Health Care Workers

Those providing direct care to patients with ILI should use the following precautions in addition to Routine Practices.

- Hand hygiene (alcohol-based hand rub or soap and running water)
- Eye protection
- Gown and gloves if there is a risk of widespread contamination with respiratory secretions
- Fit-tested N95 respirator

After the patient leaves the examining area, surfaces which may have been touched by the patient (stretcher, counters, overbed tables) and been contaminated with droplets must be cleaned with a hospital-grade disinfectant.

## 3. Laboratory Testing

*NOTE: Laboratory testing for influenza where patients have mild illness is not currently recommended.*

If, in the opinion of the clinician based on severity of clinical presentation, laboratory testing is required, a nasopharyngeal (NP) swab should be obtained. If an NP swab is obtained, specimens should be

forwarded to the clinician's local community or hospital laboratory. Influenza A positive samples (and all other samples where Influenza A molecular testing is not available) will be forwarded for further testing at the Central Public Health Laboratory (Toronto) or the nearest Regional Public Health Laboratory (PHL).

Molecular testing for the 2009 Influenza A H1N1 virus is also at being performed at several hospital laboratories. Some of these laboratories are able to report confirmed cases of the novel influenza A H1N1. Further confirmation of these results at PHL is at the discretion of the laboratory director.

### Specimens

- Nasopharyngeal swab in viral transport media

It is critical that clinical symptoms and risk factors be written on the test requisition in order to triage specimens. Specimens from asymptomatic patients will not be tested.

### Transportation of Specimens

- Transport specimens to the laboratory at 4°C
- For critically ill patients, please phone 1-800-640-7221, or after hours 416-605-3113.

If additional NP swabs and transport media required: Please fill out a Supply Requisition Form and send to your local public health laboratory.

To access the form go to  
<http://www.oahpp.ca/SRI%20Bulletin.php>

Click on the document: Requisition for Specimen Containers and Supplies – August 2007.

### 4. Patient Reporting

There is no requirement for reporting cases of ILI to your local health unit beyond that which is usually required for seasonal influenza. Specifically, patients who have laboratory confirmed influenza or those who are part of an unusual cluster must be reported promptly to your local public health unit. Institutional outbreaks of respiratory infections are reportable as usual.

### 5. Patient Disposition and Treatment

Patients who do not require admission to a health care facility should be provided with education to assist in containing the spread of their illness to others. This education should include information on:

- Hand hygiene
- Respiratory cough etiquette
- Social distancing (i.e. minimizing contact with family members, not going out in public while symptomatic)
- Absence from their workplace is dependent on the work setting. In general:
  - *Patients working in a non-healthcare setting should remain off work until they are afebrile and feeling better.*
  - *Patients who work in a healthcare setting should remain off work until 7 days after the onset of their symptoms and they are afebrile and feeling better.*

NOTE: It is not unusual for individuals to experience a cough for days to weeks post infection. Presence of a cough in the absence of other symptoms is not sufficient to keep an employee away from the work setting.

Individuals who work in health care settings are less likely to be able to practice social distancing during the course of their work. In addition, they may be providing close care to patients who may be at higher risk of complications should they become ill.

### Treatment Recommendations

Treatment of the following groups with ILI with oseltamivir is currently recommended within 48 hours of the onset of symptoms:

- Fever and acute ILI or pneumonia requiring hospitalization
- ILI and at risk for complicated disease

Other patients with ILI do not require treatment.

## **Comment on the treatment of children and pregnant women**

Oseltamivir and zanamivir are 'Pregnancy Category C' medications, indicating that no clinical studies have been conducted in humans to assess the safety of these medications for pregnant women. The National Advisory Committee on Immunization has stated that in 'healthy pregnant women the risk of influenza-related hospitalization increases with increasing length of gestation; e.g. it is higher in the 3rd than the 2nd trimester.' In making treatment decisions, the 3rd trimester more than the 2nd trimester should be considered a risk factor for more severe influenza whereas first trimester pregnancy should not be considered a risk factor for severe disease.

On May 12, 2009, CDC published recommendations for the treatment of pregnant women. These recommendations are available at:

[www.cdc.gov/mmwr/pdf/wk/mm58d0512.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/pdf/wk/mm58d0512.pdf)

There are no corresponding Public Health Agency of Canada recommendations at this point in time.

Clinicians must make treatment decisions in collaboration with their patient considering the best available information, authoritative guidelines and the clinical presentation of the patient. Any decision related to the treatment of a pregnant woman should be made between the clinician and patient after careful discussion of the risks and benefits of the proposed treatment.

The use of oseltamivir in children under the age of 1 year has been studied in a very limited number of children. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has recently received emergency approval in the United States for use in infants under 1 year of age with suggested dosing guidelines. The use of zanamivir in children under the age of 7 is not well studied and it is technically difficult to administer.

The Canadian Paediatric Society has recommended that the use of antivirals in children be confined to:

- Children hospitalized with H1N1 influenza
- Outpatient children with moderate illness and specified underlying chronic health conditions.
- Details regarding the treatment of children are available at:  
[www.cps.ca/english/statements/ID/H1N1Mexico2009.htm](http://www.cps.ca/english/statements/ID/H1N1Mexico2009.htm)