

PBCN Health Services H1N1 Influenza

One of the highlights of the mainstream news agencies, since last April, has been the H1N1 virus pandemic that is now worldwide. The “hype” and conflicting stories have caused confusion and may have created anxiety as to what might be expected when the H1N1 virus arrived in Northern Saskatchewan. The following information is provided in light of some the questions raised by community members and it is hoped that it will clarify these questions.

What is a Pandemic?

The simplest definition is that it is an influenza that occurs in many countries at the same time. A Pandemic is caused by new or unique virus that people do not have a resistance to. The most notable Pandemic occurred in 1918. It was called the Spanish Influenza and approximately 50 million people died from this disease. Much has changed since 1918 with respect to quality of living and Health Care. It is highly unlikely that the world will ever be affected to that level again.

History has taught Health experts that Pandemics occur approximately every 30 years. The last Pandemic happened in 1968 (Hong Kong Flu) and since it had been over the 30-year marker the world was “overdue” for the next Pandemic.

What is H1N1?

H1N1 is a new virus that was identified in April 2009 in Mexico. Since it was a new virus people had not built up a resistance to, many became ill. H1N1 is highly contagious and began spreading to many other countries from persons that had been in contact with infected persons in Mexico. It has now spread around the world and is predicted to be the main flu in this year’s flu season.

The pandemic H1N1 influenza virus is similar to seasonal influenza. H1N1 characteristics include:

- Influenza-like illness (ILI): acute onset of fever and cough and one or more of: sore throat, muscle aches, joint pain, or weakness. Vomiting/diarrhea may be present and fever may not be prominent.
- Transmission: directly from person to person through coughing or sneezing, and indirectly from touching contaminated surfaces and objects and then touching the eyes/nose/mouth.
- Contagious: transmission is most likely to occur during the first few days of obvious ILI illness.

How do I protect myself from getting the H1N1 flu?

Like any influenza, the best way to reduce the spread of the virus is to practice good infection prevention and control behaviors. This includes practices:

- Hand Hygiene - Scrub your hands, between your fingers, under you nails, wrists, and forearms with soap for 20 seconds, then rinse thoroughly,

- Cough and Sneeze Hygiene Etiquette - Use disposable tissues for wiping noses and throw the tissue away immediately in the garbage. Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when sneezing and coughing. If you don't have a tissue use the crook of your arm. Wash your hands or use alternative hand sanitizers after coughing, sneezing or using tissues.

What has PBCN Health Services done to prepare?

PBCN Health Services Inc. has been preparing for the eventual Pandemic. The first step was to hire a Pandemic Coordinator to assist with the development of community plans. The Coordinator worked with the Health Directors in each community and Pandemic Planning Committees were identified for each of the PBCN communities. The committees then developed community Pandemic Plans using a template provided by the Northern Intertribal Health Authority. The committees were comprised of interested members from the various agencies in each community. It was essential that all agencies were involved, as a Pandemic will affect all organizations in a community and not solely health. For communities that do have a Health Center plans were also developed, either solely with the community or in cooperation with the Health Region that the community is in. In Sandy Bay and Denare Beach, community plans were developed that included Mamaweton Health Authority. The community of Kinoosao developed a Pandemic Plan and is included in the overall plan for Southend. The community of Sturgeon Landing developed a Pandemic Plan and is included in the overall plan for Deschambault Lake.

The committees remain in place to this day. The community plans are periodically reviewed and have been tested to ensure that all areas of concern are addressed. Each community has a Pandemic Coordinator, who is responsible for the coordination of the plan. PBCN Health in Prince Albert also has a Pandemic Coordinator on staff that is responsible for updating of the plan, coordinating training for community members interested in participating in the Pandemic Plan and other aspects of the planning and implementation of each community Pandemic Plan. However each plan will only be successful with the participation of community members.

PBCN Health Services has also developed a Pandemic Plan for the office in Prince Albert and defined what additional assistance they can provide in a Pandemic. As part of the overall preparedness, packages for each household in the PBCN communities, were prepared and distributed to each Health Center. These packages contained information on Self-Care, First Aid, Infection Control Guidelines and basic medical supplies (thermometer and masks) that would be off use to prevent the spread of H1N1. The masks provided are to be worn only by individuals that may have H1N1 and would prevent the spread by coughing or sneezing. The wearing of the mask will not prevent a person from catching influenza.

Additional Steps the Community Health Centers may take

As part of their community Pandemic Plans the community Health Centers will be implementing some changes to their procedures. Some of these changes may include issuing of masks to persons that have signs of influenza when they come to the Health Center. These same persons may be asked to sit in an area other than the main waiting room. These are precautions to limit

the potential spread of the influenza at the Health Center. Other precautions may be taken as well and they as well will be taken to prevent or limit the spread of the influenza.

In addition it is anticipated that the services at the Health Centers may be limited to Emergencies only. This could happen if the community Health system becomes overwhelmed by the number of sick from H1N1.

Vaccinations

Public Health Canada has advised that the vaccine for H1N1 will be available by the middle of November. It is anticipated that there will be enough vaccine for everyone in Canada and will be available at the Health Center by the middle of November. All community members are encouraged to receive the vaccine. Once the vaccine is at the Health Center community members will be advised as to when vaccinations will be done in the community.

Additional Information

This brief article will not answer all the questions that there are regarding H1N1. Community members are urged to keep updated on this influenza and to take precautions to prevent its spread. For updates on the influenza you can contact your community Pandemic Coordinator or the PBCN Pandemic Coordinator. Contact information is as follows:

Pelican Narrows Pandemic Coordinator	– Keith McCallum	- 632-2046
Deschambault Lake Pandemic Coordinator	– Ms. Rhoda Beatty	– 632-2106
Southend Pandemic Coordinator	– Ms Carol Pontague	– 758-2063
PBCN PA Pandemic Coordinator	– Duane Hiebert	– 953-4425

It is likely that the H1N1 influenza will be an item in the news for some time. Do not always believe every item that is in the news as it may not be accurate. There are web sites available that will provide H1N1 updates and some of these sites are as follows:

Northern Intertribal Health Authority	www.nitha.com
Public Health Agency of Canada	www.publichealth.gc.ca
Saskatchewan Health	www.health.gov.sk.ca
World Health Organization	www.who.int/en/