

Patient Handout on H1N1 Influenza Virus

Swine influenza virus (referred to as SIV or H1N1) refers to influenza cases that are caused by Orthomyxoviruses endemic to pig populations. “Swine flu” has infected some people every year, typically people who have been in direct contact with pigs. The concern is that now H1N1 is also being spread by person-to-person transmission.

There is no research that can predict who is at risk and who is not. What the history of previous influenza pandemics has indicated is that patients who had the greatest mortality were those whose immune system over-reacted after the initial influenza virus infection. The following groups are considered to be more at risk from the current H1N1 virus: children under the age of five; pregnant women in their second or third trimester and people with chronic health conditions. Underlying conditions that increase risk include asthma and obesity.

The H1N1 influenza virus has not mutated between the first and second wave indicating that it will, in all likelihood remain a mild to moderate disease.

Signs and Symptoms

The signs and symptoms most commonly associated with the H1N1 influenza virus are:

- Symptoms are similar to those of regular flu and include cough and fever, muscle aches, sore throat, headache, decreased appetite, runny nose, shortness of breath, disorientation, chills and fatigue
- Some patients have also reported nausea vomiting and diarrhea

In children emergency warning signs requiring urgent medical attention include:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish skin color
- Lack of thirst resulting in not drinking enough fluids
- Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and a worse cough
- Fever with a rash

In adults, emergency warning signs requiring urgent medical attention include:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Sudden dizziness or confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting

How does the H1N1 influenza spread?

- The H1N1 influenza is transmitted from person-to-person in the same way that seasonal flu spreads, i.e., through coughing or sneezing of people with the virus. Sometimes people may become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose.
- Infected people may be able to infect others beginning one day before symptoms develop and up to seven or more days after becoming sick.
- It takes at least 14 days to mount an immune response to the H1N1 vaccine meaning that people are at risk of contracting the virus for up to three weeks after getting the inoculation.

Naturopathic Preventive Strategies

The following strategies are beneficial in the prevention of diseases such as the H1N1 influenza virus:

Hygiene

- Cover nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. Throw the tissue in the trash after using it and wash your hands ASAP.
- Cough or sneeze into sleeve or jacket of bent arm rather than into closed fist or open hand.
- Wash hands frequently with soap and water, especially after a cough or sneeze.
- Avoid touching any part of the face: eyes, nose or mouth.
- Gargle twice a day with warm salt water to prevent proliferation of the H1N1 virus
- Clean your nostrils daily with warm salt water by using a neti pot or nasal irrigator (available at most pharmacies and health food stores) or by swabbing both nostrils with cotton buds dipped in warm salt water.

Avoid close contact with sick people

- If sick, stay home from work or school to rest and heal.
- Limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.

Lifestyle

- Ensure adequate rest and reduce stress to ensure your immune system is at its best.
- Walk and do stretching exercises to boost the immune system (Note: extreme aerobic exercises and weight training are best minimized if you have any of the above symptoms).

- Dry skin brushing and contrast showers are useful to support optimal lymphatic system function.
- Allow a mild to moderate fever. A fever of 1-3 degrees above normal core body temperature (37.5 degrees Celsius) has a profound effect on immune modulation and optimizes the healing response.
- Drink at least six glasses of warm liquid daily.
- Eat foods that are rich in vitamins and minerals such as dark leafy greens, and berries and citrus fruits for vitamin C.
- Stay away from sugar and simple carbohydrates, which reduce immune activity and increase the change of secondary infections.
- Focus on eating warm foods that are easy to digest and support immune activity such as soups, stews and baked dishes.

If you or someone you know is experiencing a new/worse cough, shortness of breath, are feeling feverish, and/or have had shakes or chills in the last 24 hours, and have travelled within the last seven days to an infected area, or have been in contact with a sick person, contact a naturopathic doctor or other health care professional immediately.

Naturopathic medicine offers a number of options to treat and manage the H1N1 influenza virus, including vitamins and minerals, probiotics, botanical formulas and homeopathic remedies.

For more information, or to find a naturopathic doctor near you to discuss treatment options, visit <http://www.cand.ca>

For up to date information on the spread of the H1N1 influenza virus visit the Public Health Agency of Canada website: <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/index-eng.php>