

Questions and Answers for Huron Perth Catholic School Communities about H1N1



Our schools have received questions related to H1N1. We will continue to keep our schools open, to educate our students. We will also continue to be in regular contact with the Health Units to ensure that our response as a School Board is based on their expertise.

It is important to remember that the H1N1 virus is not a school-based disease, nor is it just a school issue. It is a community-based disease and a health issue which is a concern for us all.

We want to share the following information with our school communities to develop an informed understanding of what is taking place in our schools and across the district:

1. Q: Are we planning to close schools because of H1N1?

A. The Ministry of Health and Long Term Care, and both County Health Units, do not recommend the widespread proactive closure of schools. This measure is not considered effective in preventing transmission as students and staff may be exposed to the virus in other community settings. The benefit of keeping schools open currently outweighs the risk of transmission in these settings.

2. Q: If there was an H1N1 case at the school, will we be informed?

A. We do know that the virus is circulating in the community. As such, the school/location will not be informed of site-specific cases of H1N1 by the Health Units. Testing to confirm which strain of flu is making someone ill is not being done except in the more rare serious cases. The Health Units will communicate with our Board and schools about the status of increased H1N1 activity that might require additional public health intervention. The H1N1 virus is the predominant flu strain circulating in Ontario this fall and public health officials expect to see H1N1 in the community, including in the school population. Influenza is a community-acquired infection, so avoiding settings, like schools, will not reduce the risk of exposure.

3. Q: If cases are not reported, how are the Board and Health Units keeping track of large numbers of cases at a single site?

A. Through on-going direct communications, the Board is actively monitoring all school sites for student absences of 10 per cent or more and reporting this information to our Health Units and the Ministry of Education.

4. Q: How does the Board make decisions about what needs to be done about H1N1?

A. H1N1 is a health issue and the School Board takes its direction from health officials - specifically the Perth District and Huron County Health Units. We also receive direction and information from the provincial Chief Medical Officer of Health and the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care. The board complies with the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care *Guidelines for the Prevention and Management of Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 in Schools*.

5. Q: What can be done to avoid getting the flu?

A. In addition to getting the H1N1 vaccine, everyone should continue to practice basic infection control such as hand washing, coughing and sneezing into sleeve or upper arms, and staying home when ill.

6. Q: Are we providing hand sanitizers in our schools?

A. Yes. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers are available in rooms that are not equipped with soap and running water. Frequent, thorough hand-washing with soap and water is the most effective avoidance strategy.

7. Q: What if I want to keep my child at home as a precaution, even if the child is not ill?

A. It is our expectation that healthy children are at school. Influenza is a community acquired infection, so avoiding settings, like schools, will not necessarily reduce the risk of exposure.

8. **Q. What if a student gets sick at school and it's thought to be H1N1?**
- A. If a student feels ill at school, the student will be taken to the office and the parent/guardian called to pick up the child as quickly as they can.
9. **Q. What are the Board's cleaning procedures to prevent H1N1 transmission?**
- A. The Board has initiated heightened cleaning procedures, and has facilitated training for our custodians, provided by the Health Units. High-touch surfaces like door knobs, panic bars, push plates and hand rails are cleaned frequently.
10. **Q. As a parent I do not want to keep students home because they may miss school work. Is that a legitimate concern?**
- A. The advice from health officials is quite clear—when you are ill, you should stay home until the fever has been absent for 24 hours and you are feeling well enough to resume normal activities. It is a key flu prevention strategy, and also critical to your personal wellness. Students need to stay home until they are well, and teachers will help with missed work upon their return.
11. **Q. I have been in contact with my child/another child/spouse/friend who I think has H1N1. Should I stay away from work or the school?**
- A. No—this is a community-based illness and we should all expect to know someone with flu-like symptoms. We continue to go to work as usual, unless we need to stay home with an ill child, and that is a family responsibility.
12. **Q: What about special events at schools like class celebrations and school dances; should they be cancelled?**
- A. At this time, the direction from both Health Units is that we continue all usual activities. Given that this is a community disease, cancelling special events will not prevent the spread of the virus. Students and other participants should be reminded, however, of standard flu prevention precautions such as frequent hand washing.
13. **Q. Is there anything coaches should do about sporting events where students gather?**
- A. Coaches should remind students and players of the flu prevention precautions, including reminders to make sure students do not share drinks/water bottles at sporting events.
14. **Q: Where can I find out more about H1N1?**
- A. If you have questions about symptoms or risks associated with influenza, you can visit the County Health Units at the following websites: Huron County: www.huroncounty.ca/health/h1n1.php and for Perth County www.pdhu.on.ca. Of course, you can also talk to your doctor or Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000.

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