

# Information on Seniors and the Flu Virus (Seasonal Flu and H1N1 Flu)

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This year, there are two types of flu circulating in Canada - the seasonal flu and the H1N1 flu virus. The seasonal flu regularly affects 10-25% of Canadians each year. While the majority of those who become sick will recover, the flu results in an average of 20,000 hospitalizations and 2,000 to 8,000 deaths in Canada each year. Seniors have the highest rate of hospitalization and death from the seasonal flu.

Healthy people over 65 years of age don't seem to be at high risk of catching the H1N1 flu or of developing serious complications. However, seniors with chronic medical conditions or weakened immune systems may be at increased risk of catching H1N1 and of developing serious complications from the flu, such as pneumonia or respiratory distress.

Everyone should do what they can to stay healthy during the flu season: practice infection prevention such as handwashing; talk to your health care provider about vaccinations; and monitor yourself and those around you for symptoms of the flu.

## H1N1 Flu Virus: Know What to Look For

Like the seasonal flu, some people who get the H1N1 flu virus will have a mild illness while other people may become very sick. To date in Canada, most cases of the virus have been relatively mild and sick individuals have recovered quickly.

An average flu sickness (both H1N1 and seasonal) will show the following symptoms:

Almost Always:	Common:	Sometimes:
Sudden onset of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>♦ Fever</li><li>♦ Cough</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>♦ Fatigue</li><li>♦ Sore throat</li><li>♦ Decreased appetite</li><li>♦ Muscle aches</li><li>♦ Headache</li><li>♦ Runny nose</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>♦ Nausea</li><li>♦ Diarrhea</li><li>♦ Vomiting</li></ul>

Early treatment can help to reduce the risk of complications if you or someone you care for develops the flu. **If you or someone you care for develops flu symptoms**, keep them at home until their fever is gone and they are back to their normal activity level, usually within one week. Give them plenty of fluids, and if they have a fever use fever-reducing medications such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen.

To find out more, visit [www.fightflu.ca](http://www.fightflu.ca) or call | 800 0-Canada (1-800-622-6232) (TTY 1-800-926-9105)

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## H1N1 Flu Virus: Signs of Severe Illness

If you or someone you care for develops the following symptoms, seek immediate medical care:

- ♦ High fever (over 39.5C)
- ♦ Shortness of breath, rapid or difficulty breathing
- ♦ Chest pain
- ♦ Bluish or grey skin colour
- ♦ Bloody or coloured sputum (spit)
- ♦ Sudden dizziness or confusion
- ♦ Severe or persistent vomiting
- ♦ Low blood pressure

## How to Protect Yourself or Someone You Care For

- ♦ Wash your hands often with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- ♦ Cough and sneeze in your arm, not your hand.
- ♦ Know the symptoms of the flu.
- ♦ Stay home if you have symptoms of the flu until you are symptom free and are feeling well and able to participate in your normal daily activities. If you have a fever you should stay home until you are fever free without the use of fever-reducing medication such as acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ASA (Aspirin).
- ♦ Talk to your health care provider about your vaccination options. Your health care provider will help you decide which flu vaccine you should be receiving - the seasonal flu vaccine, the H1N1 flu vaccine or both vaccines. If you are a healthy senior then your health care provider may only recommend the seasonal flu vaccine as you are not at greater risk of catching the H1N1 flu or of developing serious complications. Below is more information about the two flu vaccines.
- ♦ If you take medication for a health condition, talk to your health care provider about having a two-week supply of medication on hand in case you get sick and cannot leave your home. This two-week supply would be in addition to your regular required supply.
- ♦ Also, if you are on medication for a health condition, keep on taking that medication if you develop the flu unless your health care provider says not to.
- ♦ Take caution in crowds where you will have little control over personal contact. Be vigilant about hand washing and carry a hand sanitizer to reduce the risk of picking up a virus in these types of settings.
- ♦ If you require ongoing medical care for a health condition such as chemotherapy or dialysis, talk to your health care provider about how you can, or if you should, access these treatments if you have the flu or develop flu symptoms.

For more information about seasonal flu and the H1N1 flu, such as information about how to take care of someone at home with the flu, please visit [www.fightflu.ca](http://www.fightflu.ca) or call 1 800 O-CANADA, TTY 1-800-926-9105.

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## Seasonal Flu Vaccine and the H1N1 Flu Vaccine

Seniors are the hardest hit by the seasonal flu; they have the highest rate of hospitalization and death. Getting the seasonal flu vaccine helps to reduce the risk of catching the flu and of developing serious complications from the flu.

This year there are two flu vaccines – the seasonal flu vaccine and the H1N1 flu vaccine. Talk to your health care provider to help you decide which flu vaccines you or someone you care for should be receiving - the seasonal flu vaccine, the H1N1 flu vaccine or both vaccines. If you are a healthy senior, your health care provider may only recommend the seasonal flu vaccine as healthy seniors are not at greater risk of catching the H1N1 flu or of developing serious complications. If you have a medical condition, your health care provider might recommend getting the H1N1 flu vaccine and the seasonal flu vaccine.

## Antivirals for Treatment of the Flu

If you develop the flu, your health care provider may prescribe antivirals for treatment of the flu.

Antivirals are prescription medications used to treat the flu. While they do not make you immune to the virus, if taken shortly after getting sick (only within the first 48 hours), they can reduce flu symptoms, shorten the length of illness and may reduce serious complications.

Antivirals may not be suitable for everyone. You should talk to your health care provider about treatment options and whether antivirals are suitable for you. If you are on medication for a health condition, continue taking that medication if you develop the flu unless your health care provider says not to.

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