



## **Swine Flu Information for Medicor Patients**

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### **H1N1 Flu Virus (Swine Flu) – What is it?**

H1N1 Flu Virus is a strain of the influenza virus. It usually affects pigs, but may also make people sick. Recently, cases of Swine Flu have been reported around the world, and the World Health Organization has declared it a pandemic influenza virus.

In Canada, we have seen many cases of Swine Flu and the number of cases is increasing. Most cases have been mild although a few severe cases, including deaths, have been seen. Just like any other flu, severe illness and death are most often related to people who have some underlying condition which makes their immune system weak.

### **What are the symptoms?**

H1N1 flu virus is a respiratory illness that causes symptoms similar to those of the regular human flu. This includes a sudden onset of respiratory illness with a fever (body temperature above 38°C or 100.4°F), cough, and other symptoms such as sore throat, runny nose, muscle aches, and extreme fatigue. Most people with influenza recover completely in 1-2 weeks. However, in a cancer patient, the severity of illness can vary.

### **What should I do?**

While you shouldn't panic, it is important to understand that infections of any kind are a special concern for cancer patients. ***Cancer patients are generally considered to be more at risk of serious flu side effects*** (due to a weakened immune system), but ***patients taking chemotherapy at high risk of serious illness due to any infection and should take all precautions to stay well*** (see below).

Influenza and other respiratory infections are transmitted from person to person when germs enter the nose and/or throat. Coughs and sneezes release germs into the air where they can be breathed in by others. Germs can also land on hard surfaces like counters and doorknobs, where they can be picked up by hands and transferred to the mouth and/or nose.

Good infection prevention measures can help protect you and others if this virus begins to spread rapidly in the city where you live.

- Avoid large crowds of people.
- Stay away from anyone with a fever, flu, or other infection.
- Stay away from small children who spend their days in group environments like daycare or school; germs spread easily in these environments.

- If you are not able to avoid the situations listed above, we recommend wearing a mask. Wash your hands immediately after removing your mask.
  - Wash your hands with warm water and soap after using the bathroom, blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
  - If you can't wash your hands, use an alcohol sanitizing gel.
  - Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze and put your used tissue in a wastebasket right away. If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve, not your hands.
  - Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth. Germs spread that way.
  - Talk to your Medicor or other health professional if you experience flu-like symptoms. They will be able to advise you about your situation including treatment options like antiviral drugs oseltamivir (Tamiflu) <http://www.tamiflu.com/>
  - and zanamivir (Relenza) <http://www.relenza.com/>
  - If you are taking chemotherapy, we advise you consider having a supply of anti-viral medication at home to prevent delays in starting treatment if you become ill (always review symptoms with your doctor first before starting the medication).
  - There is a test available for H1N1 flu which your doctor can arrange if you become ill
- ***The swine flu vaccine has recently been released in Ontario.*** It is called Arepanrix and is manufactured by GlaxoSmithKline. See <http://www.gsk.com/> for the latest information.
  - Preliminary data shows that the chance of side effects with the H1N1 vaccine (with adjuvant) is higher than the regular flu vaccine. However, these are minor or moderate side effects only (like sore arm, low fever, or mild flu-like illness, lasting 24-48 hours).
  - After carefully reviewing the preliminary data on vaccine side effects and the issues regarding the adjuvant and its contents, ***we are recommending the vaccine (with adjuvant) to most of our cancer patients and their household contacts.***
  - Medicor's medical director (Dr. Khan) believes the benefits far outweigh the risks for high risk patients and health care workers, and he will be vaccinated this week.

**For the most up-to-date and accurate information about H1N1 influenza, please see the following websites:**

<http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/>

<http://www.who.int/csr/disease/swineflu/>