

October 2, 2009

Information for Hemodialysis Patients about H1N1 Flu Virus

Hospitals, public health units, care facilities, and dialysis units across BC are operating as usual.

What is the H1N1 flu virus?

The H1N1 virus is a type of flu virus that regularly infects pigs, but may also make people sick. Symptoms are similar to the common flu and can include high fever, cough, headache, general aches, fatigue, eye pain, shortness of breath, and lack of appetite. Some people have also reported runny nose, sore throat, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea.

How is the virus spread?

The H1N1 flu virus is mainly spread person-to-person through coughing or sneezing by people infected with the virus. People may also become infected by touching something with the H1N1 flu virus on it, such as counters or doorknobs, and then touching their eyes, nose or mouth.

What should I do if I've been in contact with someone who has H1N1 flu?

If you are told you have been in contact with someone who has this flu, it is very important for you to monitor yourself for symptoms, including fever and new or worse cough. If you also become short of breath contact your physician for advice. If you are not feeling sick, you do not need to see a doctor or take preventative medicine.

What should I do if I think I am sick with the H1N1 flu virus?

If you have sudden onset of flu-like symptoms (such as a new fever or cough), call 8-1-1. The staff there can guide you and provide you with the latest information about the flu virus. **Even if you are having symptoms, you should come to your scheduled dialysis appointments, BUT call the hemodialysis unit to inform them.** If you are a community dialysis patient, you will stay in your community dialysis unit, as long as you are well enough to dialyze there. Please note: Your dialysis time or location may change. This will decrease the chance of spreading the virus to other people.

You can also reduce the risk of getting the H1N1 flu or spreading the virus to others:

- Wash your hands regularly with warm water and regular soap, especially after you cough or sneeze.
- When you can't wash your hands, use a hand sanitizer.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue into the trash right after you use it, and wash or sanitize your hands right away.
- If you don't have a tissue, cough and sneeze into your upper arm or sleeve.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth as germs can spread that way.
- If you get sick, contact your dialysis unit for advice regarding your ongoing treatment.
- Try to limit contact with others.



What should I do if my symptoms become worse?

If your symptoms are severe (e.g. shortness of breath or chest pain), go to your local Emergency Department and ask for a mask as soon as you get there. Tell the nurse and doctor that you have been exposed to someone with the H1N1 flu virus.

Where can I find more information about the flu?

BC health authorities have frequently updated information on their respective web sites. A series of informative questions and answers is also available from the government of BC at www.gov.bc.ca/health.

For up-to-date information about the flu situation, you can call HealthLink BC at 8-1-1 (toll-free, 24 hours a day/seven days a week) or visit www.healthlinkbc.ca

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in the United States has provided some additional guidance and recommendations specific to outpatient hemodialysis centers. You can call the CDC at 1-800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636) or visit their [website](http://www.cdc.gov) to view this information.