

INFLUENZA UPDATE OCTOBER 8, 2009

Latest Developments

There has been a frequently referred to, but as-yet unpublished, Canadian study that suggests an association between seasonal flu vaccine and acquiring a mild case of the H1N1 virus. This study is inconsistent with other international studies, and has failed to show a relationship that one causes the other. Both the Public Health Agency of Canada and the World Health Organization have responded to the study, saying that preliminary data show that there is no link between having a severe bout of pandemic flu and having had a seasonal flu shot last year. New Brunswick's position on this study has never changed.

In making decisions for the province, we balanced this known significant risk and a vast body of published research against the results of one unpublished study, and determined that the best way to protect all New Brunswickers from both diseases was to move ahead with our plans to run a seasonal flu immunization campaign in October, and an H1N1 immunization campaign through November.

We are running both campaigns because it is the best decision for New Brunswick. We made operational decisions early on that will allow us to have the capacity to offer both vaccines.

<http://www.qnb.ca/cnb/news/he/2009e1521he.htm>

Guidance for GNB Employees

If you are presently experiencing the following symptoms:

Fever and cough, and one or more of:
sore throat,
body aches and
fatigue,

Please isolate yourself from others until symptom free and feeling well. If you are sick enough that you would normally contact your health-care provider, please do so. If you are not sick enough that you would normally contact your health-care provider, please isolate yourself from others.

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The New Brunswick Department of Health is aware that a couple of school boards in Quebec are recommending that pregnant teachers stay home and do not attend school. This is a special situation under local occupational health and safety laws that are not found anywhere else in Canada. It is **not** a recommendation of the Quebec public health agency or any other Canadian jurisdiction.

The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) and the New Brunswick Department of Health both recommend that pregnant women go about their lives normally. This includes attending their workplace including if this is a school setting. Pregnant women are no more likely to become infected than any other group. Avoiding work will not decrease that risk as they are still exposed in contact with their family, exposed in the supermarket and so on. While some pregnant women have fared badly when infected we recommend that they seek care early if they feel unwell rather than isolating themselves when well.

Self Isolation

Based on national discussions and agreement, the guidance for “self isolation” for those with Influenza-like Illness (ILI)¹ has been changed. Previously, the advice was “to self isolate for seven days”; however, current guidance recommends that individuals with ILI should:

- *Limit contact with others until free of symptoms and feeling well;*
- *As per previous advice, it is still recommended that people with ILI should decrease their contact with household members as well as others in the public; and,*
- *Individuals should consider ending self isolation when they are able to participate fully in normal daily activities. Parents of young children should consider ending their child(ren)’s self isolation when the child(ren) is/are able to participate fully in normal daily activities.*

Seasonal Influenza Vaccination

While the seasonal flu vaccine does not protect against H1N1, receiving the seasonal flu shot is an important step toward staying healthy this flu season. Seasonal influenza is a serious disease and the influenza vaccine is an effective method of prevention. The influenza vaccine is safe, has minimal side effects and cannot give you influenza.

Employees are encouraged to get this seasonal influenza shot. The costs will be covered by your respective departments. Information on dates and locations will be coming soon.

A recent Canadian study has shown that people who had received the seasonal influenza vaccine may be more at risk of contracting the H1N1 influenza. However, this has not been shown in any other similar studies done in Europe, Australia and the United States. In addition the increased disease seen in the Canadian work was mild only. On the advice of CDC the US is continuing with their seasonal flu campaign, as is New Brunswick.

The New Brunswick Health Department (NB DOH) encourages individuals at high risk of influenza complications and their household contacts to be vaccinated against seasonal influenza. These include those with chronic diseases, the elderly, young children and pregnant women. The NB DOH also encourages all people who wish to protect themselves against influenza to receive a seasonal influenza vaccine this year.

In order to avoid confusion with the roll out of pandemic vaccine, seasonal influenza is likely to be available only during the month of October. Please access the seasonal influenza vaccine early this year.

Public Guidance

People should stay informed. They should continue to take routine precautions such as:

- Washing their hands often and thoroughly
- Coughing and sneezing into their arm
- Keeping common surfaces and items clean and disinfected, and
- Staying home if they are sick (unless otherwise directed to seek medical care)

Persons at high risk of complications from influenza-like illness should seek medical attention promptly. Those at risk include pregnant women, people with underlying medical conditions such as diabetes, or those with compromised immune systems.

Persons with influenza-like symptoms should stay home and minimize contact with family members as much as possible. If symptoms worsen, they should visit their physician or nurse-practitioner, a walk-in clinic, or the nearest hospital emergency department. It is recommended that such persons limit contact with other people, including other household members, until they are free of symptoms, and are feeling well.

¹ *ILI is defined as the acute onset of respiratory symptoms with fever and cough, and one or more of the following: sore throat, body aches, and fatigue. Vomiting and diarrhea may also be present and fever may not be prominent*

Those experiencing influenza-like illness should consider ending self-isolation when they are able to participate fully in all of their normal daily activities.

It is important for New Brunswickers to understand that if they do not have influenza-like symptoms, it is safe to go to work and school, to participate in activities and to socialize.

Information on the virus, methods of prevention, and medical referrals, are available through New Brunswick's 24-hour H1N1flu phone line at **1-800-580-0038**. More information and tips can be found at www.gnb.ca/flu

Shared Responsibility

As was expected, cases continue to be reported here and elsewhere. We cannot be complacent or we won't be ready if the severity of the disease increases. This is why government continues to prepare:

- All government departments are fully engaged in planning and preparing for a potential pandemic.
- Government is fully committed to the business continuity process to ensure that critical services will continue to be provided in the event of a pandemic. The New Brunswick Emergency Measures Organization is co-ordinating the review and refinement of these processes with all departments.
- The departments of Health and Public Safety are contacting stakeholders especially the most vulnerable and critical infrastructure owner/operators to ensure they have the right information and are taking appropriate steps to prepare.

As New Brunswickers, we all rely on private sector companies and other organizations, and we urge them to take steps now as well to prepare.

H1N1 Vaccine

The H1N1 vaccine is in production and will be available for New Brunswickers as soon it is ready.

The provincial government has invested \$17.1 million to provide the H1N1 flu vaccine free to all New Brunswickers who choose to be immunized. Preparations are underway to hold mass vaccination clinics throughout the province. A public awareness campaign will be launched to give New Brunswickers the specifics of where, how and when they may obtain the vaccine.

New Brunswick will be drawing upon federal guidelines to establish H1N1 flu vaccination clinics in the province. The guidelines, released by the Public Health Agency of Canada, suggest that the at-risk groups that should be targeted for early vaccination include:

- persons younger than 65 with chronic health conditions;
- pregnant women;
- healthy children six months to five years of age;
- persons living in remote and isolated settings or communities;
- health-care workers involved in pandemic response or the delivery of essential health-care services;
- household contacts and care providers of persons at high risk who cannot be immunized or may not respond to vaccines; and
- other groups identified as high risk.

In terms of implementation in New Brunswick, our programs are being designed to offer vaccine early to reach all priority groups listed as well as Aboriginal communities, school-age children, and at correctional facilities.

Be informed. <http://www.gnb.ca/flu>
<http://intranet.gnb.ca>

Info toll-free 1 800 580 0038