

Caring for someone at home with H1N1 flu virus

Step #1. Protect yourself and others

- If possible, have the **sick person wear a simple surgical mask**¹ if you or someone else is in the same room within two metres (six feet) of him/her. If the sick person cannot tolerate a mask, encourage the use of a tissue when coughing or sneezing. If you are going to be within two metres (six feet), you can wear a simple surgical mask
- **Clean your hands often**, either soap and water or a hand sanitizer before and after putting on or taking off a mask, after touching anything that a sick person has touched (such as dishes, towels, clothes, and trash), before you eat and before touching your eyes, nose or mouth
- There is no evidence that wearing a mask will protect you from getting the flu. However, if you wear a mask, wash your hands before and after putting on, or taking off, the mask

Step #2. Allow the sick person to rest (away from others)

- It is expected that anyone sick with the H1N1 flu virus will need lots of rest and will be contagious for about seven days from the onset of the symptoms -- especially in the first few days
- They should generally stay at least two metres (six feet) away from others
- Clean items (such as the phone, TV remote) and surfaces that the sick person has touched using normal household disinfectant. The virus can survive on hard surfaces for up to 48 hours
- The sick person can resume normal activities after symptoms are resolved

Step #3. Treat the fever and cough

- The ill person should cover the cough with a tissue or his/her arm. If needed, give a mild cough suppressant, especially at night to help them sleep. It is not recommended to give children under six years old cough suppressant. Fever often comes with chills or aches and pains. Acetaminophen or ibuprofen every four to six hours may help to bring down the fever and take away the aches. **Do not give aspirin to children with fever** as it has been linked to Reye's Syndrome², a potentially fatal disease associated with aspirin consumption by children with viral diseases

Step #4. Give lots of fluids, nutritious food and ensure a smoke-free environment

- This all helps the body recover

For more information please visit
www.york.ca/H1N1 or call York Region
 Health Connection at 1-800-361-5653.

Step #5. Keep the sick person’s things separate

- Each sick person should have his/her own personal items (towel, face cloth, toothbrush etc.) and they should be kept separate from the belongings of others in the house. Wash your hands after touching the items belonging to the sick person and avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth
- Keep common surfaces (door knobs, light switches) clean and disinfected. A disinfectant that is one part bleach and 10 parts water is recommended. Clean the bathroom daily

Step #6. Stay alert for complications

- When treated at home with proper care, most people will begin to feel better after a few days. Take the sick person’s temperature daily to track any fever. Sometimes people with underlying medical conditions - such as asthma or diabetes -- may develop complications and so may need to see a health care provider

Here is a list of complications to look for:

- **Shortness of breath, rapid or difficulty breathing**
- **Chest pain**
- Bluish or grey skin color
- Bloody or coloured mucus/spit
- Sudden dizziness or confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- High fever lasting more than three days
- Low blood pressure

Additional symptoms to watch for in children:

- Not drinking enough fluids or eating
- Not waking up or interacting
- Irritability; not wanting to play or be held

If any of these complications occur, seek medical attention immediately. Monitor yourself and other family members for flu symptoms.

¹ Surgical masks are quite inexpensive and can be purchased at your local pharmacy. If you do not have a mask, other options such as covering your nose and mouth with a bandana, could also provide protection (launder after use). Respirators (such as N95 masks) will not provide any more protection than surgical masks unless they are properly fit-tested.

² A potentially fatal disease associated with aspirin consumption by children with viral diseases.

Note: This guidance document is adapted from the Public Health Agency of Canada in response to the recent outbreak of H1N1 flu virus in Canada. This guidance has been developed to assist people in caring for someone at home who is recuperating from the virus. This guidance is based on current available scientific evidence about this emerging disease, and is subject to review and change as new information becomes available.