

# Public Health Response to H1N1 Flu Virus (Human Swine Influenza) in Canada

## INTERIM RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING SCHOOLS AND DAYCARE CENTRES

This guidance is being provided by the Public Health Agency of Canada in response to the current outbreak of H1N1 flu virus (Human Swine Influenza). This document has been developed to assist public health authorities with the public health response in Canada. 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.

### Purpose

This document provides specific recommendations regarding considerations for school and daycare centre closures in response to the current H1N1 Flu Virus (Human Swine Influenza) situation in Canada.

It should be noted that these public health response recommendations may change as further information about the epidemiology and severity of illness of this novel virus becomes available.

### Background

The content of this document is based on the general recommendations included in the Public Health Measures Annex (M) of the Canadian Pandemic Influenza Plan for the Health Sector which have been interpreted in light of the current situation in Canada.

The goal of the Canadian Pandemic Influenza Plan is to first minimize serious illness and overall deaths, and second to minimize societal disruption among Canadians as a result of an influenza pandemic.

The current epidemiology of the H1N1 influenza virus infection in Canada appears to be presenting symptoms similar to seasonal influenza.

### Interim Recommendation

In light of the goals for pandemic response in Canada, and given the current occurrence of illness similar to typical seasonal influenza, **the Public Health Agency of Canada is not recommending the closure of schools and daycare centres at this time.** This advice also applies even if a confirmed case is identified in a school or daycare centre. Ill students and staff should remain at home and seek medical attention as necessary.

### Considerations

In a severe pandemic, school and daycare closures, in combination with other social distancing strategies, are potentially a valuable strategy to slow the spread of disease. The goal of this approach would be to limit the spread of a pandemic, mitigate associated morbidity and mortality, sustain the health care system and other critical infrastructures, lessen the impact to the economy and the functioning of society and to allow for time for a vaccine to be ready.

With the current situation of the H1N1 influenza virus infection in Canada causing generally mild illness with symptoms similar to seasonal influenza, school and daycare closures would not be appropriate as the resulting disruption would outweigh any potential benefits.

Schools and daycare centres should be encouraged to promote basic infection control practices using recommended cough etiquette like handwashing, covering one's cough and sneezes and avoiding contact with people who are sick ( <http://www.fightflu.ca/prot-eng.html>). Ill students and staff should remain at home and seek medical attention as necessary.

It is recognized that at times, local school and daycare officials may decide to temporarily close a school or daycare centre for reasons such as insufficient staff available to function safely. If an affected school or daycare centre is closed, dismissed students should be encouraged not to congregate in large numbers in other settings.

For more information on public health measures, please go to Annex M, Public Health Measures, the Canadian Pandemic Influenza Plan at <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/cpip-pclcpi/ann-m-eng.php>