

# Influenza A(H1N1)

## Self-care guide



What you need to know  
What you need to do  
Protecting yourself and others

**Keep this guide**

Québec 

## Table of contents

### 1 About influenza and pandemics

- 1 Definitions
- 1 How the virus spreads
- 2 People at risk
- 3 Symptoms
- 3 Symptoms in children and young people
- 3 Recovery

### 4 Protection, prevention and health advice

- 4 Ways to protect yourself against influenza
- 5 Precautions and care
- 7 Precautions at work

### 8 Medication for relieving symptoms

### 9 Caring for sick children

### 10 Hygiene and prevention measures

- 10 Hand-washing
- 11 Respiratory hygiene
- 11 Using a face mask

### 12 Personal medical record

### 13 Decision chart

Produced by:  
Direction des communications, Ministère de la Santé  
et des Services sociaux

The original French version of this publication, entitled *Guide auto-soins ce que vous devez savoir ce que vous devez faire, pour protéger votre santé et la santé des autres*, was published by the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux. The Ministère accepts no liability for this English translation, nor for any damages, loss, or harm that may result from it. In the event of contradiction between the English and French versions, the French version shall take precedence.

Legal deposit:  
Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec, 2009  
Library and Archives Canada, 2009  
ISBN: 978-2-550-48888-0 (printed version)  
ISBN: 978-2-550-48889-7 (PDF version)

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part,  
provided the source is mentioned.

© Gouvernement du Québec, 2009

# Why a self-care guide?

Health care begins at home.

This guide will help you make the best decisions regarding your health and the health of your loved ones during an A(H1N1) influenza pandemic.

This guide tells you:

- the best ways to protect against flu;
- how to take care of yourself and give basic care to people around you;
- when and whom you should see if you need care or services.

## Keep this guide.

This guide is also available in French. To obtain a copy, visit [www.pandemiequebec.gouv.qc.ca](http://www.pandemiequebec.gouv.qc.ca) or ask at your health and social services centre (CSSS) or at a Services Québec office.

## Keep yourself informed!

Regularly check the Québec government's website on pandemics: [www.pandemiequebec.gouv.qc.ca](http://www.pandemiequebec.gouv.qc.ca).

Watch the media (television, newspapers, radio, the Internet) for notices and instructions from the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux.

*The influenza virus  
is very easy to transmit.*



# About influenza and pandemics

## Definitions

Influenza (flu) is a very contagious infection of the lungs and airways. It is caused by an influenza virus that can be transmitted from person to person.

A pandemic occurs when a new strain of flu virus - one that is different from the influenza viruses that go around each year - spreads throughout the world. Since most people will have no immunity to this new strain of virus, it will cause more cases of sickness.

## How the virus spreads

The flu virus spreads very easily. An infected person can be contagious:

- up to 24 hours before symptoms begin;
- up to 7 days after symptoms begin.

Contagiousness is higher in the first three to four days after the onset of symptoms.

The virus is transmitted in droplets from the nose and mouth. When an infected person sneezes or coughs, these droplets are sprayed into the air. If the person covers his or her mouth and nose, the droplets will be trapped on the hands, or on the mask, tissue, or handkerchief used.

Influenza can be caught by:

- touching a contaminated surface with the hands and then touching the nose, mouth, or eyes;
- touching an infected person, for example, kissing them or shaking their hand.

Symptoms generally appear one to four days after infection, but in rare cases can take up to seven days to appear.

The influenza virus most easily survives in cool, dry places. It is spread when people are in close contact with one another. This type of close contact occurs in many situations, including living in the same household as others, caring for a sick person or being in public places.



# About influenza and pandemics



## { People at risk }

**Most people in good health recover from influenza on their own.** However, certain groups are at risk of developing very serious complications from the disease. **As soon as flu symptoms appear (see the table of symptoms on page 3),** these people must consult a physician in order to receive early antiviral treatment within 48 hours.

**People in the following groups are at risk of complications and should seek medical attention quickly:**

- pregnant women;
- very young children (under 2 years old);
- cancer patients and immune-deficient or immune-suppressed people;
- people with chronic heart or lung diseases;
- people with liver disease;
- people with diabetes;
- people aged 65 and over.

## Symptoms

The common cold, which is a much more benign infection of the airways, is often mistaken for flu.

SYMPTOMS	FLU	COLD
Fever	Usual Temperature between 38°C and 40°C (between 100.4°F and 104°F) Sudden onset Lasts 2 to 5 days	Rare
Cough	Usual Lasts about 1 week	Usual, but mild or moderate
Headaches	Usual, sometimes severe	Rare
Aches and pains	Usual, sometimes severe	Rare
Fatigue	Usual, intense Lasts a few days, occasionally longer	Usual, but mild
Nausea and vomiting	Usual, especially in children	Rare
Nasal congestion and runny nose	Rare	Usual
Sneezing	Rare	Usual
Sore throat	Rare	Usual
Chest pains	Usual, sometimes severe	Usual, but mild or moderate
	<p>If you have flu symptoms, you can call Info-Santé 8-1-1 or see a doctor, depending on the seriousness of your symptoms. To avoid infecting others, it is important that you follow the instructions from Info-Santé or your doctor.</p>	

## Symptoms in children and young people

Children's symptoms may be different from those of adults. Be vigilant if your child **has a fever** and has one or more of the symptoms listed in the following table (see also the section Caring for sick children, page 9).

0-5 YEARS	6-18 YEARS
Irritability	Coughing
Loss of appetite	Muscle pains
Rasping cries	Headache
Rasping cough	Intense fatigue
Diarrhea	Sore throat
Vomiting	Nasal congestion
Abdominal pains	Runny nose
Shortness of breath	Shortness of breath



## Recovery

In general, most people return to their normal activities soon after their illness. The antibodies you develop while ill will protect you in future against the virus that infected you.

# Protection, prevention and health advice



## Health advice

### Ways to protect yourself against influenza

#### Wash your hands often

Frequent handwashing is the best way to protect yourself and others against influenza. People living with you or caring for you should also wash their hands frequently. Teach children the right way to wash their hands (see page 10).

When soap and water are not available, you can use antiseptic towelettes, or alcohol-based (60% to 70%) antiseptic gels, foams and liquids.

#### Avoid contact with infected people

When a member of your family or household has flu, you must avoid contact with his or her personal items such as towels, utensils, cups, etc. The same goes for other people in the household, since a person can be contagious even without having any symptoms.

#### Get vaccinated

**Seasonal flu vaccine** does not protect against the new A(H1N1) flu virus. The Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux will provide the public with guidelines regarding vaccination against A(H1N1) flu and seasonal flu in newspapers, on the radio and television, and on the Internet ([www.pandemiequebec.gouv.qc.ca](http://www.pandemiequebec.gouv.qc.ca)).

## *Pay attention to notices and guidelines from the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux in the media (television, newspapers, radio, the Internet).*

People at risk of complications should still receive the pneumococcal vaccine. Check with a health professional to find out whether you are among those at risk of complications (see page 2).

### **Wear a face mask**

You should wear a face mask (see page 11) if you are in contact with a sick person who coughs or sneezes.

## **Precautions and care**

### **Get some rest**

You will feel weak and tired until the fever subsides. Rest will help you fight off the infection. **Limit contact** with others until your symptoms have ended. If your symptoms last longer than seven days, you can resume your activities if your general condition allows.

### **Drink plenty of fluids**

It is important to drink fluids frequently and in sufficient quantity, because fever makes you sweat, causing you to lose a great deal of water.

Take cold or warm drinks, as you prefer, but avoid alcoholic drinks and drinks containing caffeine (e.g. coffee, tea, or energy drinks). Alcohol and caffeine cause you to urinate, increasing fluid loss. Watch out for signs of dehydration (especially infrequent urination or dark urine), dizziness, headache, and confusion.

### **Protect those around you**

To protect those around you, follow the guidelines below until your symptoms disappear:

- Stay in your room to avoid infecting the people you live with.
- When you sneeze or cough, cover your nose and mouth, preferably with a paper tissue (see page 11). Wash your hands afterwards.
- If you don't have a tissue, sneeze or cough into your elbow or upper arm instead of your hand, since these parts of your arm don't usually come into contact with people or objects (see page 11).
- Spit into paper tissues.
- Throw tissues away in a garbage can lined with a garbage bag. Keep it closed or out of reach of children.
- Keep your visitors to a minimum.

### **Wear a face mask**

If you have a fever or if you are coughing and sneezing, wear a face mask when you are with others.

**If you are sick, stay home as soon as symptoms begin.**





## Keep your home clean

Since the influenza virus can survive up to two days on hard surfaces, it is important to clean counters, washbasins, and all other surfaces that are frequently touched with the hands. Cleaning these surfaces eliminates any viruses found there. Use water with soap or domestic detergents. A disinfectant solution (for example, 1 part bleach in 50 parts water) is highly effective for toilets and washbasins.

If you are sick, your bedding, towels, clothes and dishes can be washed with those of other people in the household using regular detergents.

## Get help

Most people have the resources they need to deal with the current situation. However, some people may feel the need to be informed or reassured about events or about their own health.

If you feel any anxiety, don't hesitate to ask for or accept help. Talk to family and friends to find people who can step in to provide help if the need arises. If you don't know anyone that can help you, call your local health and social services centre. You can also contact Info-Santé 8-1-1 for information, or the Centre de relations avec la clientèle of Services Québec (see page 13).

## Stay informed

For up-to-date information, listen to the radio, watch television, read newspapers, and visit the government's website on the pandemic: [www.pandemiequebec.gouv.qc.ca](http://www.pandemiequebec.gouv.qc.ca)

Notices and guidelines for the public from the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux will appear in the media to direct people to facilities where they can see a doctor, receive care, get access to antivirals or get vaccinated. Always observe current notices and guidelines from the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux: they may change as the situation develops.

## Teach your children the basic rules

Show them:

- how to wash their hands properly with soap and water (see page 10);
- how to blow their noses or sneeze into paper tissues (see page 11);
- how to cough or sneeze into their elbow or upper arm (see page 11).

Remind them often to stay away from people who are sick.

Keep your **Decision Chart** (see page 13) visible or handy. This chart will help you quickly decide on the best resource depending on the situation.

*Useful tools can be found on the Québec government's pandemic website: [www.pandemiequebec.gouv.qc.ca](http://www.pandemiequebec.gouv.qc.ca)*



# At work

## Precautions at work

At work:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water. When soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based antiseptic (gel, foam or liquid).
- Clean nearby hard surfaces and objects that might be touched or handled by those around you.
- Avoid greeting people with handshakes, hugs or kisses.
- If you are sick, stay home. Find out what your employer's instructions are regarding returning to work.

# Medication for relieving symptoms

## Use medication properly

Unless there are complications, or factors that create a risk of complications (see page 2), influenza does not need to be treated with medication. However, non-prescription drugs can be used to relieve the symptoms of influenza. Before using them, carefully read the labels and take only the recommended dosage. Avoid using multiple products containing the same ingredients at the same time (e.g. Tylenol™ and Tylenol Sinus™, which both contain acetaminophen). If you suffer from chronic conditions (e.g. hypertension, glaucoma), consult your pharmacist or Info-Santé 8-1-1 before using these products.

If the severity of your symptoms (see the **Decision Chart**, page 13) or your condition (see page 2) leads you to consult a designated care facility. **Do not forget to bring a complete, up-to-date list of all the medications that you are taking, and give it to the health professionals who see you.**

Depending on their evaluation of your condition, health professionals may decide to give you antiviral medications. These can help reduce the duration and severity of symptoms. Take the medication you are prescribed according to the instructions, and contact your pharmacist about any problems you may have while taking it. Finally, always keep medications out of the reach of children.

**To reduce fever (38°C/100.4°F or higher)**, take acetaminophen (e.g. Tylenol™) or ibuprofen (e.g. Advil™, Motrin™), except if advised not to by your doctor or if you are allergic to these medications.

Unless directed by a doctor or pharmacist, do not take ibuprofen if you are over 65, pregnant, or nursing, or if you suffer from gastrointestinal problems, hypertension, heart problems, kidney problems, or blood clotting problems. Take acetaminophen instead. Ibuprofen must be taken with food.

**For muscle pains**, take acetaminophen (Tylenol™ or other) or ibuprofen (Advil™ or other) every four to six hours unless otherwise directed by your doctor.

**For a sore throat**, gargle with salt water: 2.5 ml (1/2 level teaspoon) of salt in 240 ml (1 cup) warm water (do not swallow). Hard candy or throat lozenges, preferably sugar-free, can also provide relief.



# Caring for sick children

## Consult a doctor:

- If your child is under 2 years old and has a temperature of more than 38°C (100.4°F).
- If your child is a carrier of a chronic illness or is immune-suppressed and has a temperature of more than 38°C (100.4°F).
- If your child seems very sick or lethargic, or if you have trouble waking him or her up.

## Give appropriate medication

If your child is more than 3 months old and has a temperature of more than 38°C (100.4°F), you can give acetaminophen (Tylenol™, Tempra™, or other), according to the directions on the package and your child's weight.

## Warning:

- Always measure your child's temperature using a thermometer, preferably a rectal thermometer. If you use an oral thermometer, wait 30 minutes after he or she eats or drinks something cold or hot before taking his or her temperature.
- Do not rub your child with alcohol to reduce fever. The alcohol can be absorbed through the skin or lungs, causing poisoning.
- Do not give ibuprofen (Advil™ or other) to children under six months old.
- Do not give acetylsalicylic acid (Aspirin™ or other) to a child under 18 years of age. At this age, aspirin combined with influenza can cause a severe disease called *Reye's syndrome*, which attacks the liver and nervous system.



## Keep the child comfortable

Make sure that your child:

- wears light clothing;
- gets plenty of rest;
- drinks enough fluids and does not show signs of dehydration, especially if he or she is vomiting or has diarrhea.

Watch for these signs of dehydration:

- six hours without urinating in babies, or more than eight hours without urinating in older children;
- hollows at the fontanelles (the soft spots on the top of a baby's head);
- cold skin that does not snap back into place when pinched;
- irritability, drowsiness.

If your child shows signs of dehydration, give acetaminophen instead of ibuprofen to relieve fever. If needed, you can give rehydration solutions (e.g. Pedialyte™), available in pharmacies.

Keep the temperature of your child's room at around 20°C (68°F).

**If your child is sick, do not send him or her to daycare, kindergarten or school, and do not allow him or her to take part in group activities.**

# Hygiene and prevention measures

## Hand-washing



WET HANDS

1



APPLY SOAP

2



RUB  
for 15 to 20 seconds

3



SCRUB  
nails

4



RINSE

5



DRY

6



TURN OFF  
the tap using  
paper towel

7

Wash your hands often, especially:

- when they are visibly soiled;
- after sneezing or coughing;
- after blowing your nose;
- after using the washroom;
- after changing a baby's diaper;
- before preparing, handling, or serving food;
- before eating;
- before putting on or taking off contact lenses;
- after handling garbage.

Wash your hands with ordinary soap and water; antibacterial soap is not necessary.

If soap and water are not available, you can use alcohol-based antiseptic gels, foams, or liquids. These should be at least 60% alcohol.

Take a little antiseptic gel, foam, or liquid. Rub your palms, your fingertips, the backs of your hands, and between your fingers. Keep rubbing until your hands are dry; do not use a paper towel.

### Warning

Antiseptic products must be kept out of the reach of young children. Children should use them only occasionally and should be supervised while using them.

*Always keep your hands away from your eyes, your nose, and your mouth.*

## Respiratory hygiene

Avoid infecting others when you cough or sneeze



**COVER**  
your mouth and nose with a tissue when you sneeze or cough.



**THROW**  
soiled tissues in the garbage.



If you do not have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your elbow or upper arm.



**WASH** hands often. Use an antiseptic product if there is no soap and water.

## Using a face mask

If you have a fever and cough, wear a mask when you are:

- with other people;
- in any care facility, such as an emergency room or a clinic waiting room;
- in a public place;
- with a sick person who is not wearing a mask (e.g. a young child).

Dispose of your used mask in a garbage can lined with a garbage bag. Keep it closed or out of reach of children.

Wash your hands after removing your mask.

Use masks that are available in pharmacies and other stores.

You can also use a cloth (e.g. cotton) scarf. Wash the scarf every day.



**PLACE**  
the mask over your mouth and nose with the flexible nosepiece upwards.



**PULL**  
the bottom of the mask under your chin.



**SHAPE**  
the flexible nosepiece to the bridge of your nose.

**CHANGE**  
your mask if it becomes damp.

# Personal medical record

Keep this record up-to-date for yourself and members of your family.\*

Take it with you when you consult a doctor or health professional.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date of birth: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Home phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
Work phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
Email address: \_\_\_\_\_  
Person to contact in an emergency: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Phone number of person to contact: \_\_\_\_\_

**Health insurance**

RAMQ health insurance number: \_\_\_\_\_  
Private insurance company: \_\_\_\_\_  
Membership number: \_\_\_\_\_

**My doctor**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**My pharmacy**

Health problems: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Diabetes     Hypertension     Heart failure  
 COPD, asthma     Kidney failure  
Other: \_\_\_\_\_  
My pharmacy's phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Drug allergies: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Food allergies	Immunizations	Date
<input type="checkbox"/> Eggs <input type="checkbox"/> Peanuts Other: _____ _____ _____	Influenza vaccine (flu) Pneumococcal vaccine Other: _____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____ _____ _____

## Medication record

Ask your pharmacist for your medication profile. (If you do not have a profile supplied by your pharmacist, complete the following form.)

Name and date of birth: \_\_\_\_\_  
Last updated: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of medication	Dosage (e.g. 100 mg, 5 mg/ml)	Frequency (e.g. 1 tablet at bedtime)

\* If necessary, copy this page and fill out one form for each person.

# Decision Chart

For display

## If you have flu symptoms

Use the guidelines in this table to help make the best decision for you and your loved ones. Always use hygiene and prevention measures to avoid contamination:

- Wash your hands frequently.
- Cough or sneeze into the crook of your elbow rather than into your hands.
- Keep your surroundings clean.

### SITUATION FOR AN ADULT OR CHILD

The person does not have a fever (temperature less than 38°C or 100.4°F), but does have these symptoms:

- Sore throat
- Stuffy nose
- Runny nose
- Cough

### DECISION

Probably a cold.  
Rest at home.

### SITUATION FOR AN ADULT OR CHILD

The person has a fever over 38°C (100.4°F). The fever came on suddenly and is accompanied by these symptoms:

- Cough
- Sore throat
- Headache
- Significant fatigue
- Muscle aches

### DECISION

Probably the flu.  
Rest at home.  
Refer to the Self-care guide.  
Call Info-Santé 8-1-1 if needed.

### SITUATION FOR AN ADULT OR CHILD AT RISK OF COMPLICATIONS

The person has a fever over 38°C (100.4°F) and belongs to a group at risk of developing complications (children under 2 years of age, seniors, pregnant women, and individuals with chronic diseases).

### DECISION

See a doctor today.

### SITUATION FOR AN ADULT OR CHILD

The person has a fever and one of these symptoms:

- Shortness of breath
- Difficulty breathing
- Painful breathing
- Vomiting for more than four hours
- Fever in a child who is too quiet and less active than normal, who refuses to play or is agitated

### DECISION

Go to the emergency room immediately.  
Call 9-1-1, if necessary.

### SITUATION FOR AN ADULT OR CHILD

The person has a fever over 38°C (100.4°F) and one of the following:

- Difficulty breathing that persists or worsens
- Blue lips
- Difficulty moving
- Severe neck stiffness
- Drowsiness, confusion, disorientation, or difficulty being roused
- Convulsions
- No urination for 12 hours
- Fever in an infant under 3 months old

## General Information

### Services Québec

Centre de relations avec la clientèle

#### Québec Region

418-644-4545

#### Montréal Region

514-644-4545

#### Elsewhere in Québec

1-877-644-4545 (toll-free)

**For people who are deaf or hearing impaired:**

1 800 361-9596 (toll free)

## Health-related Questions

### Info-Santé 8-1-1

[www.guidesante.gouv.qc.ca](http://www.guidesante.gouv.qc.ca)

[www.msss.gouv.qc.ca](http://www.msss.gouv.qc.ca)

## Important Phone Numbers:

Your pharmacist:

Your doctor:

Your CLSC:

Stay informed. Visit [www.pandemiequebec.gouv.qc.ca](http://www.pandemiequebec.gouv.qc.ca) for up-to-date information.

Santé  
et Services sociaux

Québec



