

# Important Health Notice

April 14, 2010

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## Information for Health Care Professionals Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 Update

This Important Health Notice (IHN) is based on current information and provides the following updates on the response to Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 virus:

- Update on influenza activity in Ontario
- Update on the pandemic H1N1 (pH1N1) vaccine
- Deactivation of response activities

### Influenza Activity in Ontario

Ontario has been experiencing very low levels of influenza activity since the beginning of January. At this time, it is unlikely that anyone presenting with an influenza-like illness would have pandemic influenza. Health care providers are encouraged to consult their public health unit and view the Ontario Influenza Bulletin to obtain regular updates on the status of influenza in their community, available at:

[http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/ccom/flu/h1n1/pro/flu\\_bulletin.aspx](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/ccom/flu/h1n1/pro/flu_bulletin.aspx).

### Influenza Activity Internationally

International pH1N1 activity continues to circulate in low levels in the temperate areas of the Northern and Southern Hemisphere. In the United States no states have reported widespread influenza activity, although regional influenza activity has been reported in Alabama, Georgia and South Carolina. Globally, pH1N1 influenza activity is highest in Southeast Asia, West Africa, and the tropical regions of the Americas. (Source: CDC)

### pH1N1 Vaccine

The Public Health Agency of Canada has revised its pH1N1 vaccine dosage recommendations for:

#### Highlights:

- Ontario has been experiencing very low levels of influenza activity since the beginning of January.
- The pH1N1 vaccine expiry date has changed, watch for more information from your Health Unit.
- A second dose of pH1N1 vaccine is no longer needed for particular groups of children.
- The Ministry Emergency Operations Centre has transitioned to *Recovery* status.
- The ministry has initiated the retrieval of antivirals supplied to pharmacies and other locations from the provincial stockpile. In addition, the provincial stockpile of supplies and equipment has been closed. Health care providers are asked to revert to normal supply practices.
- pH1N1 guidance documents are no longer in effect. Health care providers should refer to the [Routine Practice and Additional Precautions in all Health Care Settings](#) document from the Provincial Infectious Diseases Advisory Committee.

- Children between six months and under three years of age.
- Children between three and nine years of age with chronic health conditions.

Two half doses of the vaccine had been originally recommended for both of the above age groups. However, with very low levels of pH1N1 activity, it is now being recommended that a second half dose is not needed for these groups.

If evidence points to an increase in pH1N1 flu activity in the future, dosing recommendations will be reviewed and updated accordingly.



The Public Health Agency of Canada has informed the Ontario government that the antigen of the unused adjuvanted pH1N1 vaccine (Arepanrix) which was meant to have a shelf life of 18 months now has a shelf life of six months. Vaccine supplies that are on hand will expire between now and end of June 2010.

This is not a safety issue but the result of further testing on vaccine stability. People who have already been immunized with Arepanrix will have immunity to the pH1N1 virus.

More information on the return of pH1N1 influenza vaccine will be available through your Health Unit.

### **Deactivation of pH1N1 Response Activities**

With the reduced level of influenza activity in Ontario, the ministry is taking a number of steps to wind down particular activities that were implemented to respond to pH1N1.

The ministry will continue to monitor influenza activity and will be prepared to reactivate these response measures if required. The following measures are being deactivated at this time:

#### *1. Ministry Emergency Operations Centre*

The Ministry Emergency Operations Centre has transitioned from its *Enhanced* level of activation to *Recovery* status. This is used to ensure a smooth transition back to Routine conditions. For further definition of these terms, please visit the following [page](#).

#### *2. Antiviral Stockpile*

The ministry has initiated the process of retrieving antiviral medications that were distributed to Ontario pharmacies and other locations during the response to pH1N1. Accordingly, health care providers are being advised that antivirals will no longer be available from the provincial stockpile free of charge for patients and routine prescribing and dispensing practices are to take effect immediately, using the commercial supply.

#### *3. Stockpile of Supplies and Equipment*

The provincial stockpile of personal protective equipment, infection control supplies and mass immunization supplies has been closed and the online ordering system has been deactivated. Health care providers are asked to revert to routine ordering practices through their existing supply chains.

#### Note:

- This stockpile continues to be available to the health care system for use during emergency situations.
- Access during an emergency can be obtained from the Emergency Management Branch through the Health Care Provider Hotline (see below).

#### *4. pH1N1 Guidance Documents*

The ministry, with the support of the Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion and other experts, released a wide variety of guidance documents to both health and non-health sector organizations to provide updated scientific information and recommended precautions specific to pH1N1 in the management of influenza and the protection of patients and staff.

These guidance documents are no longer in effect. To guide the return to normal practices, health care providers are advised to refer to *Routine Practices and Additional Precautions in All Healthcare Settings* from the Provincial Infectious Diseases Advisory Committee:

[http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/providers/program/infectious/diseases/ic\\_routine.html](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/providers/program/infectious/diseases/ic_routine.html)

In addition, for influenza pandemic planning and preparedness purposes, health care providers should continue to refer to the *Ontario Health Plan for an Influenza Pandemic* available at [www.health.gov.on.ca/pandemic](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/pandemic)

#### **Health Care Provider Hotline:**

If you are a health care provider and have any questions or concerns, please call the Health Care Provider Hotline toll-free at 1-866-212-2272. Hours of operation are Monday to Friday 0900hrs to 1700hrs.

*(original signed by)*

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