

## H1N1 the “Newest” Camper this Summer

Summer camp is a time of learning new skills and making new friends. Campgrounds echo with the sound of children’s laughter, and memories are made around the glow of a camp fire. Summer camp is supposed to be a time of carefree joy, but this past summer, it is also a time of illness as several overnight camps have had campers become ill with the H1N1 virus.

This virus, similar to the ‘seasonal’ flu, is spread through coughing and sneezing or by touching your nose or mouth after touching an object with the virus. Unlike the seasonal flu, which affects the oldest and youngest of our population, this virus seems to be affecting those between 5 and 24 years of age. And this is the very age group most likely to attend camp, or to work at a camp as a counsellor or lifeguard.

Campers and staff can be at risk for infection from the physical structure of the camp (shared sleeping quarters and shared washrooms), the location of the camp (wilderness, not located near medical facilities), or lax hygiene enforcement, a lack of hand washing facilities or alcohol-based hand sanitizers).

The Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term Care has issued guidelines for influenza-like illnesses (ILI) in summer camps. These include:

- Screening campers for ILI symptoms prior to them boarding bus transportation to overnight camps. Those showing symptoms should be asked to return home.
- Ensuring alcohol-based (60-90% alcohol) hand rub and facilities for hand washing (running water, dispensed soap, paper towels) are located throughout the camp, particularly in the dining room and other areas where campers congregate.
- Ensuring sleeping arrangements are in a head-to-foot placement in bunk beds with an arms length between persons – this applies to tents as well as cabins.
- Designating an area that allows a sick individual to be isolated from the others. This area should have surgical masks and its own disinfectants.
- Making arrangements in advance for prompt identification and medical attention for ‘wilderness’ type camps or those that have a wilderness component. This may require the use of satellite phones and arrangements with water or air evacuation services.



- Regularly sanitizing all commonly-touched surfaces such as light switches, door handles, counters, sports equipment, tables, etc.
- Create a checklist of what must be wiped down, and ensure that this is done frequently.
- Requiring staff to observe all participants and each other for evidence of flu symptoms, which is typically a fever and cough with at least one of the following: sore throat, muscle aches, joint pains, or weakness. In addition, some children under the age of 5 may also have gastrointestinal symptoms rather than a fever.
- Monitoring the health of all staff and participants, and advising the local Public Health office if the illness rate exceeds 10%.

Have a protocol in place on when parents are to be contacted and when participants are to be released from the camp program.

Although summer camps traditionally end as Labour Day approaches, this also heralds the time when schools and recreational programs gear up for their fall and winter sessions. It is unlikely that the threat of H1N1 flu will disappear with the change of the seasons. Schools, daycare providers and municipal

recreational programs will all need to incorporate prudent H1N1 flu prevention protocols into their fall programs.

The Ministry of Health of each province issues flu prevention updates and guidelines for schools, camps, businesses, etc. These guidelines must be scrupulously followed, and a means found to document how these protocols were incorporated by each organization.

*After all, viruses don't take vacations.*