

May 22, 2009

Dear Stakeholder:

As you know, District Health Authorities, the IWK, government and public health and health system partners across the province have been working closely together to manage the H1N1 (human swine influenza) situation in the province.

As of May 21, 2009, the total number of cases reported in Nova Scotia since the outbreak began on April 26 is 69. All cases were mild and have not required hospitalization. In the last week, we've seen a significant decline in the number of new cases.

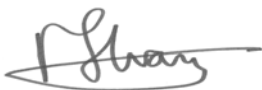
When H1N1 first appeared in Nova Scotia, our goal was to slow the spread of the virus. This approach was based on the fact that H1N1 was a new virus and we weren't sure how severe it would be. Over the last few weeks, we've learned that H1N1 acts very much like seasonal influenza. As a result, we are shifting our approach to manage the virus the same way we would manage seasonal influenza. Other provinces are also moving, or will soon be moving, in this direction. As part of the transition in Nova Scotia, and due to a reduced volume of calls, the toll-free, general information line that was established will now be a voice recording only.

It is very possible that H1N1 will reappear in the fall and it could potentially be much more severe. Government, District Health Authorities, the IWK and health care workers are actively preparing and planning for that possibility. I would encourage you, as a stakeholder, to also prepare for the potential that this virus could return with increased severity in the fall. You can do this by ensuring your own business continuity plans are in place and by keeping up-to-date on the most current information. The H1N1 situation should be a valuable learning experience for everyone in Nova Scotia – government, public health, business, communities and citizens.

I'd like to stress that prevention is always the best way to prevent influenza-like illness. Wash your hands frequently, cough or sneeze into your sleeve or arm, frequently clean and disinfect common surfaces and items such doorknobs and counters, and stay away from public places if you are sick. Visit www.gov.ns.ca/hpp/cdpc/h1n1-influenza-posters.asp for general handwashing hygiene posters you can post in your office or facility.

Thank you for your support and assistance in sharing information about H1N1 the last few weeks. I will likely call on you again in the fall as we prepare for influenza season.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R Strang", written over a horizontal line.

Robert Strang, MD, MHSc, FRCP(C)
Chief Public Health Officer
Department of Health Promotion & Protection