



Communiqué to First Nations Communities

April 29, 2009

TO: ALL FIRST NATIONS CHIEFS AND COUNCILS, AND HEALTH MANAGERS/DIRECTORS

RE: SEVERE RESPIRATORY ILLNESS (SRI) IN MEXICO (SWINE FLU)

BACKGROUND

The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) has been alerted to clusters of a severe respiratory illness confirmed to be from a new strain of influenza (H1N1), more commonly called the Swine Flu. Outbreaks originated in Mexico and similar outbreaks have occurred in the US. There are an increasing number of cases in Canada. Individuals who have recently travelled to Mexico and who are experiencing flu-like symptoms are currently at risk.

So far, there are no reported cases involving First Nations.

The virus includes influenza-like symptoms which are usually felt all over the body in the form of fever, muscle aches, head ache, chills, nausea, vomiting, tiredness, and a dry cough. The current cases in Canada have exhibited mild symptoms while those in Mexico have been more severe.

The World Health Organization is monitoring the spread of the virus and will adjust the pandemic alert level as needed. This in turn will guide the decisions of the Public Health Agency of Canada who have the lead on Pandemic Emergencies in Canada.

How do people get it?

Influenza and other (severe) respiratory infections are transmitted from person to person via the respiratory route. Coughs and sneezes release the germs into the air where they can be breathed in by others. Germs can also rest on hard surfaces like counters and doorknobs, where they can be picked up on hands and transmitted to the respiratory system when someone touches their mouth and/or nose.

First Nations

While there have been no reported cases among First Nations, these events demonstrate the need for pandemic planning. Some First Nations communities have

already developed and tested comprehensive pandemic plans and are doing regular surveillance activities. Others are at the beginning stages of developing plans and are not adequately prepared in the event of an outbreak.

First Nations and Inuit Health Branch (FNIHB) work closely with PHAC in developing approaches to on reserve preparedness. FNIHB has supported many Regional activities by assisting communities with the development of pandemic plans and have initiated testing exercises in many Regions. More work is needed to ensure adequate preparedness in all FN communities.

What can be done to prevent the spread of the flu?

The Public Health Agency advises Canadians to:

- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and warm water, or use hand sanitizer
- Cough and sneeze in your arm or sleeve
- Get your annual flu shot
- Keep doing what you normally do, but stay home if sick
- Check www.fightflu.ca for more information
- Check www.voyage.gc.ca for travel notices and advisories
- Talk to a health professional if you experience severe flu-like symptoms

The AFN is recommending that community leaders work with their emergency preparedness coordinators to support increased pandemic planning activities as needed. This should also be done in collaboration with FNIH Medical Officers of Health.

For more information, visit:

Public Health Agency of Canada: (Hotline 1-800-454-8302)

- <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/index-eng.php>

US Centre for Disease Control

- <http://www.cdc.gov/>

World Health Organization

- <http://www.who.int/en/>

www.afn.ca or please contact:

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