



COMMISSION DE LA SANTÉ ET DES SERVICES SOCIAUX
DES PREMIÈRES NATIONS DU QUÉBEC ET DU LABRADOR

FIRST NATIONS OF QUEBEC AND LABRADOR
HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES COMMISSION

CSSSPNQL/FNQLHSSC • 250, Place Chef Michel-Laveau, Wendake (Québec) G0A 4V0
Téléphone/Telephone : (418) 842 1540 Télécopieur/Fax: (418) 842 7045

RELEASE

Report on the epidemic of swine influenza

Wendake, Tuesday 28 April, 2009 – Human swine influenza has been reported in Canada, Mexico and the United States. The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) is working collaboratively with Mexican and American officials to further investigate this situation. Governments around the world and the World Health Organization are engaged to investigate and address this situation.

Swine influenza is a strain of influenza virus that usually affects pigs but can also attack humans. It is a respiratory illness that causes symptoms similar to seasonal human influenza.

Fearing that a new strain of swine influenza may give rise to a pandemic, the World Health Organization (WHO) has put itself on alert. The WHO had “activated its operations center” to gather all the information and centralize the organization's action in emergency situations. The first meeting of the Emergency Committee was held on Saturday 25 April 2009.

At least six cases of human swine influenza have been reported in Canada to date and 30 cases, including two in Quebec, seem to have a direct link with it. The director of Public Health of Quebec, Dr. Alain Poirier, said at a news conference held Sunday with the Health Minister, Dr. Yves Bolduc, that he now strongly believes in the emergence of cases in the coming days in Quebec.

The Health minister was anxious to review the situation in Quebec, in the wake of the recent warnings by the WHO on the risks of world spread and after the announcement of the first six confirmed cases in Canada: four in Nova Scotia and two in British Columbia.

In Nova Scotia, where four cases have been confirmed, in a secondary school in the Windsor area, the infected persons suffer from the mild form of the disease, and no acute case, such as those reported in Mexico, was listed. The infected persons are high school students aged from 12 to 18 returning from a trip to Mexico. They have been isolated for a period of seven days while they are still contagious. As for the two cases identified in British Columbia, they are travelers returning from Mexico and they suffer from mild symptoms.

The two cases currently under investigation in Quebec come from Montreal and Mauricie. They have symptoms similar to swine influenza, but no diagnosis to that effect has yet been issued. Again, these travelers are returning from Mexico. They suffer from mild symptoms.

Swine influenza, what is it? How is it transmitted? Is it treatable?

What type of virus is it?

According to experts, it is a respiratory disease of pigs, a type A influenza virus. This virus of animal origin is identified as A/H1N1

Why does the virus emerge now?

We do not know yet. Many unknown information remains. Similarly, we do not know how the virus is transmitted or how it is deadly. The lack of knowledge comes from the fact that the virus mutated in a new way, in genes never encountered before.

How is it transmitted?

It is not by eating meat, even pork, because the virus does not survive cooking. It spreads from man to man, by airborne transmission. That is why it is recommended to put a mask over your mouth to avoid the interaction of airborne particles with the people with whom you are in contact and to wash your hands on a regular basis.

What are the symptoms?

They are not specific and are similar to those of influenza (known as "seasonal"). They are fever, cough, runny nose, joint and/or muscle pains (ache), fatigue, and diarrhea.

Who may it affect?

The disease can affect young healthy adults, warn the world health authorities. We do not know more for now.

Is there a vaccine against this disease?

Yes, for pigs, but not for man - the only vaccine that exists for humans corresponds to a previous strain of the virus, rendering it poorly effective for the form of swine flu that we are facing. Similarly, the vaccine against seasonal human influenza will not protect against swine influenza. The Swiss pharmaceutical group Novartis has been contacted by the World Health Organization (WHO) to develop a vaccine on the current strain. According to the laboratory Sanofi Pasteur, the largest human vaccines company in the world, four months will be needed to develop it.

Until an efficient vaccine can be produced, we must maintain open and active communication with Regional Agencies and the Department of Public Health, to know the recommended course of action for community members wishing to travel to Mexico or the USA in one of the areas where cases have occurred. Maybe these people should still be vaccinated. Indeed, even if present vaccines are not effective against the virus of swine influenza, if need be, they would at least allow the immune system to better react to it.

We stress the fact that those who were vaccinated last fall are no longer protected and are as exposed to risk as those who were not vaccinated. The same question also concerns the medical staff, who are among the ones who are the most exposed to the risk of contamination.

Is there a cure for swine flu?

There are anti-viral drugs that can treat this disease. Tamiflu, an oseltamivir-based drug used against avian influenza, is also effective for this virus.

Basic hygiene measures to avoid contracting or transmitting an infection

- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water, especially before preparing food and after using the toilet, or when you've been in contact with one or more persons (meetings, gatherings, etc.)
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you sneeze.
- Clean and bandage your wounds. Always see a doctor when you have any serious injury
- Do not remove the skin during wound healing and avoid popping pimples.
- In the presence of symptoms of infection (diarrhea, fever, etc.), stay at home and go see a doctor.
- If desired, disinfect regularly kitchen and bathroom surfaces with bleach added to water.
- Avoid or delay travel to other provinces or outside the country if you can.

Preventive measures suggested to the health directions of First Nations communities

This alert is an excellent opportunity to rehearse for a real pandemic. What we are living in the moment is the best exercise there is.

Certain measures should be taken pretty quickly concerning the response capacity of the community's services:

- Alert the services (monitoring) without mobilizing them.
- Review everyone's roles and the priority actions to take.
- Use this alert as a pretext to enable the communication links between the community's internal services and with the Quebec health network and hold daily meetings on the issue until the situation is clarified.
- Communities' health services should prepare and have a plan in case the Department of Public Health of Quebec decides to vaccinate the entire population.

Finally, we recommend each community to check its preparedness in the five components of the health mission by completing the ***Influenza pandemic checklist for community health and social services directorates*** that can be found in the annex to the report entitled ***Evaluation of the preparedness for an apprehended influenza pandemic of the First Nations communities of Quebec***. An electronic version is available on our website: <http://www.cssspnql.com/eng/sante/pandemie.htm>

We remind you that this is an informational message. We will keep you informed of any developments in this matter.

Follow the case on the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/alert-alerte/swine-porcine/faq_rg_porcine-fra.php

Prepared by: Chantal Cleary, Communication Officer
Michel Deschênes, Policy Analyst

Sources: World Health Organization (WHO)

Public Health Agency of Canada
Dr. Renaud Leroux, MD, CCFP (EM), CSPQ, Adm.A