1. What is H1N1?

In Spring 2009, a new strain of the influenza virus, H1N1, was identified as causing influenza infections in people in North America. As soon as H1N1 rapidly spread worldwide, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared a flu pandemic. Since the end of the 2009 H1N1 pandemic, the H1N1 influenza virus continues to circulate in Canada and other countries including the United States, this is referred to as the post pandemic phase.

2. How is the virus spread?

The H1N1 flu virus is spread in the same way as regular seasonal influenza viruses, mainly from person to person through coughing or sneezing. It can also be spread by touching infected surfaces or objects then touching your eyes, mouth or nose.

3. What are the signs and symptoms of illness with H1N1 flu?

Symptoms include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Children may also experience vomiting and diarrhea. Illness with the H1N1 virus has ranged from mild to severe. As with seasonal flu, certain people are at a higher risk of serious complications, including people 65 years and older, children younger than five years old, pregnant women, and people of any age with certain chronic medical conditions.

4. How can I protect myself?

   i. Wash your hands! You should wash your hands often with soap and water. If hand washing facilities are not available, an alcohol-based hand sanitizer should be used.
   
   ii. Cough and sneeze into the sleeve of your arm.
   
   iii. Discard tissues after use and immediately wash your hands
   
   iv. Avoid touching your face, germs are spread this way.
   
   v. Stay home when you’re sick to prevent the spread of the virus.
   
   vi. Get vaccinated. The current seasonal flu vaccine protects against the H1N1 virus.

Immunize BC offers a “find a flu clinic locator” on their website at: http://www.immunizebc.ca/. However, with flu vaccine supplies running low, always check ahead before visiting a doctor, pharmacist or health clinic to ensure the vaccine is available.

5. What should I do if I get the flu?

If you think you have the flu and are uncertain whether to see a doctor or go to hospital, call 8-1-1 and speak with a registered nurse who will be able to assess your symptoms over the phone, and provide advice on taking care of yourself and when to seek medical attention. 8-1-1 line is operated by BC Health Links which is part of the BC Ministry of Health. This service is available 24/7 and upon request offers translation services up to 130 different languages.

6. Where can I get more information?

SFU Health and Counselling Services: http://www.sfu.ca/students/health/slides/fluinfo.html

Public Health Agency of Canada: http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/influenza/

Centres for Disease Control and Prevention: http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/qa.htm