

Questions and Answers: Seasonal flu and H1N1

What is influenza?

Influenza (“the flu”) is a common respiratory disease caused by a virus that attacks the lining of the respiratory tract (nose, throat and lungs). In Canada, seasonal flu causes thousands of people to miss work, school and other activities every year.

Why is Influenza A-H1N1 getting so much attention? Is it more dangerous than other strains of influenza?

The reason that the Influenza A-H1N1 is getting so much attention is that it is new, not because it is necessarily worse than other seasonal viruses. Since it is a new strain, people will likely have no natural immunity to protect against the virus.

If I have had the flu or feel unwell, can I still donate?

If you are unwell with flu-like symptoms, you should not give blood. To determine if you are healthy enough to donate today, please take our influenza [self-check](#) for donors. This self-check is intended for people who may be experiencing flu-like symptoms. If you have questions about your eligibility to donate for this or other reasons, please call 1-888-2-DONATE (1-888-236-6283).

- For info about H1N1 virus or pandemic influenza, visit: www.phac-aspc.gc.ca.
- For further information about eligibility to donate blood, please call **1-888-2-DONATE** (1-888-236-6283).

Can I get the flu through a blood transfusion or by receiving any other blood product?

No cases of transfusion transmitted seasonal influenza have been reported as a result of seasonal flu or the H1N1 outbreak.

Can I get the flu by donating?

Donating blood does not put you at risk of disease. All needles are sterile, used only once and discarded. Canadian Blood Services has hygiene and infection control measures in place to enhance the protection of our donors, staff and volunteers.

Influenza and other respiratory infections are transmitted from person to person when germs enter the nose and/or throat. Coughs and sneezes release germs into the air where they can be breathed in by others. Germs can also rest on hard surfaces, such as 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. The Public Health Agency of Canada recommends that people should continue normal activities.

Canadian Blood Services continues to monitor the situation and to implement procedures to reduce the risk of exposure to donors, staff and volunteers.

Will donating blood compromise my immune system and make me more susceptible to contracting the flu?

Donating blood is a personal decision. There is no evidence that donating blood negatively impacts on your immune system's ability to fight off infection. If, however, you feel at all unwell, you should not donate blood.

How do I know if I have the H1N1 virus?

Symptoms include fever, cough, runny nose, sore throat, body aches, fatigue, and lack of appetite. Additional information can be obtained at the website www.fightflu.ca provided by the [Public Health Agency of Canada](#).

What can I do to slow the spread of the flu?

There are some simple, common-sense ways that you can use to help fight the spread of infection and illness, including influenza.

- **Get a flu shot**
The single best way to prevent the flu is to get a flu shot. **Note:** You must wait 48 hours after your flu shot to donate blood or blood products.
- **Wash your hands frequently and thoroughly**
Washing your hands frequently with soap (it does not need to be antibacterial soap) and water will help protect you from all sorts of germs and viruses. Wash immediately after any cough or sneeze or after touching common surfaces that may be contaminated.
- **Avoid close contact with the ill**
Avoid close contact with people who are sick, and, when you are sick, keep your distance from others to protect them from getting sick too.
- **Stay home when you are sick**
If possible, stay home from work or school and do not run errands when you are sick. Drink lots of fluids and get lots of rest. You will feel better faster and you will help prevent others from catching your illness.
- **Cover your mouth and nose when coughing**
Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. Throw away the tissue...then wash your hands!
- **Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth**
Germs are often spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose, or mouth.

Sources: Health Canada-It's your health, Centers for Disease Control

Can I donate if I have had a flu shot?

You must wait 48 hours after your flu shot to donate blood or blood products.

Can I donate if I am taking the anti-virals Tamiflu or Relenza?

There is no deferral for donors taking Tamiflu or Relenza in order to **prevent** getting the flu. However, if either of these drugs has been prescribed because you have the flu, then you will have to wait until you are completely well before you can donate.

Where can I get additional information?

For more information about the H1N1 virus or seasonal flu, visit the Public Health Agency of Canada's website at www.phac-aspc.gc.ca. Additional information is also available in the brochure, [*Preparing for the Flu: Information for You and Your Family*](#).