

Influenza A (H1N1) – Protect Your Health and Your Family’s Health



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United Nurses of Alberta

During the last few weeks Alberta Health and Alberta Health Services (AHS) have issued a number of memorandums and guidance documents for health care workers related to the recent outbreak of influenza A (H1N1). These guidance documents are based on guidelines released by the Public Health Agency of Canada. It is United Nurses of Alberta’s position that these guidelines do not go far enough to protect nurses. In response UNA has issued a position statement and recommendations.

Precautionary Principle

Our position statement and recommendations are based on the precautionary principle, which states that when an activity puts human health or the environment at risk the highest level of precautionary measures should be taken in the absence of full scientific certainty. The 2007 final report of the SARS Commission showed broad support of this principle.

To date, there has been no scientific confirmation of the mode of transmission of this virus.

UNA & AHS Agreement on N95 Respirator Readiness

UNA and Alberta Health Services reached an agreement that requires the employer provide N95 respiratory fit-testing for all employees covered by the UNA Provincial Collective Agreement and that they have an adequate supply of N95 respirators available.

UNA Says Err On The Side Of Caution

United Nurses of Alberta is taking the position that until such time as there is scientific certainty regarding the mode of transmission of Swine Influenza A (H1N1) all Employees covered by the Multi-Employer/UNA Collective Agreement that are required to provide patient care for suspected or confirmed influenza A H1N1 cases must be provided with an appropriate supply of fit-tested N95 respirators and mandatory education on donning and doffing N95 respirators.

Along with respiratory protection, in addition to routine practices, infection control measures for suspected and confirmed cases of the influenza should include contact precautions, respiratory hygiene, accommodation, eye protection, surveillance and reporting.

You need to assess whether you believe that you need to be provided with N95 respirators (fit-tested), and glove, gown and eye protection. If your employer refuses ask to be reassigned.

What You Need to Know:

▶ Get Fit Tested!

Fit-Testing is now mandatory as per Article 35.02 (a)

▶ Ensure you have enough N95 respirators

This applies to all areas of health care including community care, public health, long term care and mental health

▶ You may be temporarily transferred

In the event of an emergency Article 44: Mobility (44.05 (e)) allows the Employer to reassign Employees from any site to perform work at any other site in emergency circumstances. An emergency is defined as “an unforeseen combination of circumstances or the resulting state that calls for immediate action”.

▶ Do not report to work if you are sick

Nurses should not be reporting to work if they have influenza like illness (fever and respiratory symptoms). Nurses who do report to work are putting patients and their co-workers at risk of infection and illness. The Alberta Government is asking that individuals with flu like symptoms stay home from work and avoid public places when ill.

▶ You do not have to put your health at risk!

The agreement between the parties states that Nurses who have not been fit-tested for an N95 respirator or are unable to achieve an effective facial seal are not expected to enter or provide services in an area where a suspected or confirmed case of swine influenza A has been identified. Nurses may be deployed to another area.

Contact your Local representative, Labour Relations Officer or OH&S Officer for additional information and assistance.