



## **Canadian H1N1 Information Clearinghouse**

**Update**

**October 9, 2009**

During the spring 2009 H1N1 outbreak, the Canadian Public Health Association (CPHA) received an overwhelming number of inquiries. This demand for information mirrored our experience during other recent public health emergencies such as the listeriosis outbreak and SARS. With over 30 years of experience in the area of knowledge exchange, CPHA is recognized by Canadians as a reliable source for public health information. We take this responsibility seriously.

In keeping with established protocols, in the spring of 2009, CPHA re-directed all H1N1 inquiries to the Public Health Agency of Canada. Many of those who contacted CPHA had already visited various government websites, but they wanted to hear from a recognized authority outside of government. They also indicated that, because there were so many sources of information (including the media) providing, at times, contradictory information, they wanted to have the government messages confirmed.

As the non-governmental voice of public health in Canada, CPHA has a responsibility to help clarify the facts regarding H1N1. While various sector leaders have been developing business continuity plans for their companies, it has become clear that it is not feasible (or sometimes appropriate) for these companies (or their trade associations) to provide their customers with public health information. In late-summer 2009, CPHA was approached by a number of groups who suggested the need for a non-governmental voice on H1N1 and as a result, CPHA developed the concept for the Canadian H1N1 Information Clearinghouse.

As an H1N1 "clearinghouse", CPHA is not creating new information. Instead, CPHA will collate information from the local, regional, provincial, national and international experts and will present it in an easy-to-access format. CPHA will build on the experience in pandemic communications it developed through "Strengthening Communications Capacity in the Non-Governmental Sector for Pandemic Influenza" project in 2006/2007. This project developed a plain language toolkit on pandemic influenza that will be updated and available for download from the Clearinghouse website.

CPHA recognizes that during a pandemic, consistent information from multiple credible sources is critical to enhance and support government activities and messaging. The Clearinghouse project was designed to be consistent with and complementary to existing government messaging. Visitors to the Clearinghouse website will be encouraged to visit the websites of the Public Health Agency of Canada as well as other provincial/territorial and local health authorities.

The clearinghouse website will include the following content, directed primarily at the general public:

- a comprehensive series of FAQs has been developed from existing resources;
- downloadable resources and links to external resources (e.g., posters, fact sheets, guides) from a variety of reputable sources;
- a database of local, regional and national health authorities from which Canadians can receive additional information; and
- a regularly updated listing of news articles which accurately reflect the evolving nature of the H1N1 pandemic.

The Clearinghouse will initially launch in a bilingual (English/French) format. As additional resources are identified, a core subset of FAQs will be translated into other popular languages (e.g., Chinese, Arabic, Korean, Farsi, etc.) given the multilingual and multicultural face of Canada. CPHA will build on the experience it gained in developing web-based resources in multiple languages during its recent "Caring for You and Your Baby" project which is available online in 12 different languages.

Given the limited resources available, the Clearinghouse will not include telephone or e-mail access. Visitors will be encouraged to visit the websites of the Public Health Agency of Canada and their local, regional or provincial/territorial health authorities for additional information.

As noted by André Picard in the October 9, 2009 edition of *The Globe and Mail*, "Confusion is what the public is feeling in response to the seemingly endless stream of contradictory news about H1N1 influenza." The goal of the Clearinghouse is to support, enhance and strengthen the efforts of the federal, provincial/territorial and local governments to protect the health of Canadians through their provision of up-to-date, reliable health information.

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