

TO: ONTARIO FIRST NATIONS COMMUNITIES
FROM: FIRST NATIONS INUIT HEALTH, ONTARIO REGION
SUBJECT: USE OF MASKS IN THE GENERAL POPULATION
DATE: SEPTEMBER 23, 2009

The H1N1 flu virus has rapidly spread across the world. The symptoms of H1N1 flu virus are similar to the symptoms of seasonal flu and can include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. The spread of the H1N1 flu virus is also thought to be happening in the same way that seasonal flu spreads. Flu viruses are spread mainly from person to person through coughing or sneezing. Sometimes people become infected by touching contaminated objects or surfaces and then touching their mouths or noses. Individuals should continue to take normal precautions to protect themselves as they would from a regular flu, such as washing their hands frequently, cover coughs and sneezes, avoiding close contact with people who are sick and stay home when ill.

The Public Health Agency of Canada and the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term Care do **NOT** recommend that healthy people wear masks or respirators (such as N95 masks) as they go about their daily lives in the community. Members of the general public do not need to wear masks/respirators to protect themselves against catching H1N1 flu virus. Wearing masks/respirators will not prevent the spread of infection in the community and using a mask in the wrong way may increase your risk of infection. For example, putting on or removing your mask/respirator incorrectly can spread virus to your hands and face.

If a person who is ill with flu-like symptoms must go out into the community (for example, to seek medical care), they should take measures to avoid exposing others to the virus, such as coughing or sneezing into a tissue or sleeve and avoiding crowds. If this is not possible, the ill person can wear a simple surgical mask to prevent exposing others in the community. Surgical masks can be bought at local pharmacies and hardware stores.

For more information regarding the H1N1 flu virus, how to care for family members and how to avoid contracting the virus, please visit the following web-site or call our toll free line.

- www.pandemic.knet.ca
- 1-877-365-3623 (Hours of Operation: 9 am–6 pm EST, Monday-Sunday)