

Pandemic H1N1, Seasonal Influenza and the Common Cold Information for Dojang Owners, Instructors and Coaches

By Dr Terry DeFreitas MD CCFP

H1N1 has had a lot of media coverage in the past few months. The World Health Organization is predicting a second wave of H1N1 cases this fall. An influenza pandemic is a widespread outbreak of disease that occurs 2 or 3 times each century when an entirely new virus appears. The virus spreads easily, and most people have little or no immunity to it. The virus can make many people very sick and sometimes causes death. Pandemics typically cause 35 percent of the population to be infected with the virus. With this number, our governmental health agencies have been working very hard to prepare for large numbers of ill people.

All health care agencies in Canada are preparing to help prevent the spread of H1N1 this fall, and when it does occur these agencies have made organizational plans to contain the further spread of the virus. These plans include quarantines on infected individuals and stringent infection control protocols at emergency rooms in Alberta.

For Dojang owners, instructors and coaches there are a few simple changes or additions to your daily routine which may prevent your students from contracting the virus and then transmitting it to other students. I hope this information helps you!

There are 3 different viruses:

H1N1

Seasonal Influenza

Common cold

H1N1: a new Influenza A strain to which most people have no immune protection. It has the same symptoms as influenza but may include nausea, vomiting and diarrhea.

Seasonal Influenza: many people have some immune protection from previous exposure. It can present with fever, cough fatigue, and muscle aches, lack of appetite or a runny stuffy nose.

Common Cold: caused by a virus – coughing, nasal congestion and sore throat are the most common symptoms. Rarely does it cause fever or

extreme fatigue. The common cold does not cause severe enough symptoms that would require hospitalization.

These illnesses have many of the same signs and symptoms and it is difficult to sort out which virus is causing all the trouble. If a person has minor symptoms and is functioning relatively normally, it is not necessary to get a viral culture to identify which virus is to blame. It is important to know which virus is to blame when the person is ill enough to be admitted to hospital or when a person has a weakened immune system from some other cause.

PREVENTION

NUMBER 1

Hand washing is the single most effective way of preventing the transmission of the virus. The virus can live on your hands for 5 minutes and on doorknobs for 1 to 2 days!

Some sports organizations have even eliminated hand shaking after games to prevent virus transmission, a bit of an extreme measure. I think if there is opportunity for students to wash hands when necessary the hand shaking can continue

In the Dojang I recommend that there are hand sanitizer dispensers either in each washroom or at the exit of the dojang training area. There are several cheap wall mounted ones you can purchase either at Costco, Staples or at the larger drug stores. The outside of these dispensers should be wiped down after busy classes to ensure the external surface is not contaminated with virus.

Hand washing signs:

www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/im/iif-vcg/wh-lm-eng.php#a

Signs at washrooms and change rooms reminding people to wash their hands are simple reminders that work.

When to clean your hands:

- Before you eat or serve food

- Before you brush your teeth

- After you are near a person with a cough or flu

- After you cough, sneeze or blow your nose

- At the end of each training session

Cough into your arm, not your hand

Do not touch your eyes, mouth or nose after shaking hands

Water:

Encourage students to have personal water bottles. Do not let students share water bottles during class. If you have a water fountain, wipe it down with disinfectant regularly and do not allow students to spit into the fountain. For sinks the same thing goes; strangely enough I have occasionally seen students rinse their feet off in the sink - do not let this happen.

Travelling to and from Sporting Events:

Carry your own hand sanitizer, use it in restaurants and airports. Any time you may have shaken hands in a meeting make sure you sanitize your hands before you touching your face or before you are about to eat or drink.

NUMBER 2**Surface Cleaning**

Wipe down sink, taps, counters and door knobs frequently, using gloves to do this.

NUMBER 3**Vaccinations**

In Alberta the seasonal flu vaccine will be available after the 13th of October. The H1N1 vaccination is expected to be available in November. High risk groups should get the vaccination right away: elderly people living in continuing care facilities, people with chronic medical conditions such as asthma or diabetes, pregnant women, health care workers and children between the age of 6 to 23 months.

I would also recommend the vaccination for people who are not in a high risk group but who travel a lot (referees, athletes) or who are in frequent close contact such as a sparring team.

NUMBER 4**Sick Students or Instructors**

You may want to put a small poster:

**“IF YOU HAVE FEVER, COUGH OR OTHER FLU SYMPTOMS
Take a reststay home
We will see you when you are feeling better”**

Let your students know that it is ok to miss training and stay home if they think they have the flu. The incubation period for H1N1 is 1 to 3 days, however, exposed people are carefully monitored for 10 days.

When a student has flu symptoms, it is not a good idea for them to exercise intensely. Further it is more likely to be transmitted if the student is coughing sneezing and sweating.

If you or one of your students is unfortunate and does contract influenza and the diagnosis is confirmed, they should expect to stay home for 7 days.

If you get a call from a student who was told they had H1N1 they are probably at home recovering.

If you get a call from Alberta Health Services do not panic; careful monitoring of H1N1 cases and their contacts will be taking place this fall.

If there are several cases from one location it is possible that some people may be asked to stay at home for 7 days. People with close contact, such as instructors, may be asked to stay home if they have any symptoms of infection. For dojang owners with several instructors, this may mean making adjustments to your schedule throughout the fall and winter. If you are alone instructing, you may need to have a fan-out phone plan in the event that you become ill and have to cancel classes.

The best case scenario is, of course, prevention by hand washing and keeping high traffic surfaces wiped down with disinfectant. As leaders in martial arts, your students will respect your instructions on prevention of infection while in the dojang, and health services relies on leaders like you in helping us prevent pandemic influenza in our community.

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