

IIHF PREVENTION OF H1N1 VIRAL INFECTION



In late April, WHO announced the emergence of a novel influenza A virus. This particular H1N1 strain has not circulated previously in humans. The virus is entirely new. The virus is contagious, spreading easily from one person to another and from one country to another. As of today, nearly 30,000 confirmed cases have been reported in 74 countries. On present evidence, the overwhelming majority of patients experience mild symptoms and make a rapid and full recovery, often in the absence of any form of medical treatment. We know that the novel H1N1 virus preferentially infects younger people. In nearly all areas with large and sustained outbreaks, the majority of cases have occurred in people under the age of 25 years. In some of these countries, around 2% of cases have developed severe illness, often with very rapid progression to life-threatening pneumonia.

Most cases of severe and fatal infections have been in adults between the ages of 30 and 50 years. Many of the deaths have also been in the pediatric age groups. This pattern is significantly different from that seen during epidemics of seasonal influenza, when most deaths occur in frail elderly people. Many, though not all, severe cases have occurred in people with underlying chronic conditions. Based on limited, preliminary data, conditions most frequently seen include respiratory diseases, notably asthma, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, autoimmune disorders, and obesity.

At the same time, it is important to note that around one third to half of the severe and fatal infections are occurring in previously healthy young and middle-aged people.

The H1N1 virus was present at the time of IIHF World Championships in May 2009. The virus created much concern for the IIHF and the Organising Committee of the World Championship. The Public Health authorities of Switzerland were consulted during the event and were able to give excellent advice on the spread and virulence of the virus. The medical officers of the Championships were also vigilant during the Championships in taking the necessary precautions to prevent the spread both in the hospital system and at the venues of the Championships. The IIHF Illness Reporting System was also introduced during the World Championship and reported on the prevalence of the virus as well as other illnesses during the event. All teams participated in the project and there were no reports of illnesses.

Following the appearance of the virus and the concern that the virus may still be present during the following year, the IIHF Medical Committee feels that the issue should be addressed and a proper strategy should be discussed and instituted during the 2009-10 season at the different IIHF championships.

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The IIHF would like to make the following recommendations to the Hosting Association regarding the spread of the H1N1 virus and other possible infections that may occur in the course of an event. Each Hosting Association should take the following measures before and during the event:

- Regular consultation of the World Health Organisation (WHO) website – www.who.int – on the possibility and risk of infection during the time of the Championship.
- Be in contact with the Public Health authorities of the country to determine risk of infection.
- Advise participating countries on the necessary vaccines for the Championship and travel.
- Institute preventive measures to control infection during the Championship (i.e. presence of alcohol based washing gels or hand sanitizers, masks for infections, isolation of players with infections).
- Encourage the use of flu vaccines for all participating players in IIHF Championships.
- Have available anti-viral medications (i.e. tamiflu) in case of an outbreak of a viral infection.
- Use the IIHF Illness Reporting System on a daily basis to establish the presence or absence of a contagious illness.
- Report to the IIHF on the presence of a contagious virus.

In the case of an outbreak, the following additional measures may need to be considered:

- Individual towels or Removal of towels on the bench.
- Individual water bottles for each player.
- No handshakes after the game.
- Use of gloves for washing of equipment.

In the event of a viral outbreak during a Championship, the following procedures will be followed:

- The Medical Supervisor will advise the Directorate Chairman.
- The Medical Supervisor will inform the Host Organiser.
- The Directorate Chairman and Medical Supervisor will consult with the Public Health Authorities.
- The Directorate Chairman will consult with the IIHF office (i.e. President).

In the event that a Medical Supervisor is not present during the Championship, the Directorate chairman will follow the same steps and the Chairman of the Medical Committee will also be consulted in the process.