

Evidence Based Strategies for the Prevention of Influenza in Massage Therapy Practice

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Massage therapists are expected to take proper precautions to prevent the spread of influenza in their clinical work. These include:

✓ **Staying current with knowledge of H1N1 and seasonal influenza, mode of transmission and treatment**

- **Signs and symptoms of influenza:**
 - Fever/chills
 - Cough
 - Runny or stuffy nose, sore throat
 - Headache
 - Muscle or bone pain
 - Fatigue
 - Diarrhea and vomiting (occasionally and more likely in children)

- People at highest risk for serious complications from H1N1 include:
 - Pregnant women
 - Adults and children with chronic health conditions including:
 - cardiac or pulmonary disorders, (COPD, cystic fibrosis asthma)
 - diabetes mellitus
 - cancer
 - immunodeficiency or immunosuppression
 - renal disease, anemia or hemoglobinopathies and conditions that compromise the management of respiratory secretions and are associated with an increased risk of aspiration.
 - Age between 20 and 49 years
 - Obese (Body mass index > 30)

- **Mode of transmission** is by inhaled droplet from an infected person's cough or sneeze; or by direct contact with objects that have droplets on them. To prevent transmission:
 - Practice Frequent hand hygiene with alcohol based hand sanitizers (ABHS) or washing with soap and water
 - Use arm to cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing
 - Stay 2 meters away from people who are sick

- Avoid self inoculation by touching nose, mouth or eyes with contaminated hands
- **Treatment:**
 - Stay at home, until at least 24 hours after symptoms have subsided
 - Prescription antivirals – i.e. Tamiflu, Relenza - can decrease the severity of symptoms and shorten recovery time if taken within the first 48 hours of infection,
 - If your symptoms worsen or you have difficulty breathing seek medical attention
- **Prevention:**
 - Getting vaccinated for H1N1 and seasonal influenza.
 - Not working when sick.
 - Providing education to patients and co-workers about influenza
 - Not treating patients who are sick with influenza like illness
 - Employing infection control principals in all work areas, – waiting room, clinic room, lavatory, office, reception area
 - Understanding immunity and healthy lifestyle
- ✓ **Get the H1N1 vaccination and the seasonal influenza vaccination**
 - Frontline Healthcare workers (including RMTs) are a priority group for receiving the vaccine
 - There is no live virus in the vaccine– you CANNOT get the flu from the vaccine
 - It is safe to get both the seasonal and H1N1 vaccine at the same time
- ✓ **Do not work when you are sick**
 - You can be infectious 24 hours before you have symptoms
 - You can return to work 24 hours after symptoms are gone
 - Avoid getting influenza by getting vaccinated
- ✓ **Do not treat patients who are sick with influenza**
 - RMTs should not treat patients who have symptoms of influenza like illness (ILI)
 - RMTs should screen patients by telephone if they call with questions about whether they should come to their appointment

- ✓ **Provide education to patients about influenza**
 - RMTs may be the point of entry to the health care system for some patients – public health messaging about the prevention of influenza is a professional responsibility.
 - Community health clinics in each Health Authority in BC will have posters and brochures that RMTs can have in their clinics to help educate their patients.
 - Posters can be downloaded from many online sources including:
 - Occupational Health and Safety Agency for Healthcare in BC. (www.ohsah.bc.ca)
 - WorkSafe BC (www.WorkSafeBC.com)
 - Provincial Infection Control Network of BC (www.picnetbc.ca)
 - BC Centre for Disease Control (www.bccdc.ca)

- ✓ **Employ infection control principals in patient and staff areas (waiting room, clinic room, lavatory, office, reception area etc.)**
 - If your clinic shares a waiting room with a medical doctor who may be treating patients with ILI review strategies recommended in the *Guidelines for Pandemic Influenza-related Office Management & Infection Control for Private Physicians* (<http://www.hls.gov.bc.ca/pho/physh1n1.html>) for infection control through scheduling and engineering approaches
 - Janitorial staff should follow the recommended cleaning protocols for infection control for cleaning and disinfection (www.picnetbc.ca)
 - Patients should be asked to fill out forms using their own pens
 - Porous surfaces that are difficult to clean should be reduced or eliminated (fabric on furniture, plush toys)
 - Treatment rooms should be cleaned at least once a day
 - Stethoscopes, B/P cuffs, gongiometers and other diagnostic equipment RMTs may use should be disinfected between patients
 - Frequently touched surfaces (e.g. door knobs, light switches, telephones, keyboards, mice, charts, cells phones etc.) should be cleaned at least twice daily

- ✓ **Individual RMT practices to enhance immunity and overall good health**

- RMTs understand the components of a healthy lifestyle which may include alternative health practices (e.g. homeopathy, acupuncture, meditation, naturopathic medicine etc.)
- **Public Health Authorities do NOT recommend using any strategy *in place of getting the influenza vaccine*, but as part of an integrated & holistic approach as per individual choice. RMTs should be very clear that all health care workers who refuse the influenza vaccine are putting their patients at risk.**

✓ **Sources of credible information on H1N1, immunity, and the H1N1 vaccine include:**

- www.immunizebc.ca
- www.bccdc.ca
- www.gov.bc.ca/h1n1
- www.hls.gov.bc.ca/pho/physh1n1.html
- www.healthlinkbc.ca
- www.fightflu.ca

✓ **Sources on Infection Control include:**

- Occupational Health and Safety Agency for Healthcare in BC. (www.ohsah.bc.ca)
- WorkSafe BC (www.WorkSafeBC.com)
- Provincial Infection Control Network of BC (www.picnetbc.ca)
- BC Centre for Disease Control (www.bccdc.ca)

Recommended single reliable source for updates on evidenced based influenza guidelines:

Provincial Health Officer's H1N1 Site for the Physicians of B.C. (<http://www.hls.gov.bc.ca/pho/physh1n1>)