

National Influenza Committee Guidelines for Ferries

Source: *Guidance to Shipping for Pandemic Influenza* by the Health Protection Agency
http://www.hpa.org.uk/web/HPAwebFile/HPAweb_C/1254510406896

Saint Lucia National Influenza Plan is available at <http://www.tiny.cc/nip>

Past Guidelines in the series are available at...

<http://stlucia.gov.lc/flu/guidelines.htm>

This document provides interim guidance on suggested means to reduce the spread of the novel influenza A (H1N1) virus. Recommendations are interim based on current knowledge of the H1N1 outbreak, and may be revised as more information becomes available.

Background

In May 2009 the World Health Organisation designated H1N1 as a "*Public Health Emergency of International Concern*" and the virus has lived up to its description. As the National Influenza Committee deepens its response to this flu, Saint Lucians are called upon to partner with the Committee.

The risk of transmission of pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza virus may be spread due to increased proximity and sometimes prolonged contact between people in an enclosed environment.

This guidance will address general recommendations that apply to all programs and some specific guidance that applies to programs for travel.

At this time, CDC recommends the primary means to reduce spread of influenza focuses on early identification of the ill. This includes the cooperation of all by staying home and away from others when ill, conducting good cough and hand hygiene etiquette, and environmental controls that encourage use of these hygiene practices.

Novel Influenza A (H1N1)

The symptoms of influenza usually include fever plus at least either cough or sore throat. These symptoms are often referred to as an influenza-like illness (ILI). Influenza infection can also lead to additional symptoms like headache, tiredness, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, chills, diarrhea, and vomiting. Like seasonal flu, novel influenza A (H1N1) infection in humans can vary in severity from mild to severe. When severe, pneumonia, respiratory failure and even death are possible.

Novel influenza A (H1N1) is thought to spread in the same way that seasonal influenza virus spread, mainly through the coughs and sneezes of people who are sick with the virus. People may also become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose.

Ferries

Ferries may be of short duration (less than an hour, even minutes) or longer (hours) some provide cabin accommodation and meals. They differ from cruise ships in that they provide an essential public service rather than a recreational one. As such, it is not practicable to restrict passengers boarding a ferry because of influenza. However, it would be reasonable to expect ferries to do what they can to prevent transmission of infection to other passengers.

Ferries not carrying a doctor

The major issues for ferries not carrying a doctor are; symptomatic crew members joining the ship, treatment of symptomatic crew, prophylaxis of other crew members and ship safety.

Passengers:

If a passenger is symptomatic, they should be seated in the most isolated accommodation area available, provided with a surgical face-mask, if available and advised about cough etiquette* and social distancing by pre-prepared leaflets. Such leaflets are available from the Bureau of Health Education of the Ministry of Health. It would be advisable to have posters displayed with respect to cough etiquette* and hand washing (also available from the Bureau of Health Education of the Ministry of Health). If Cabins are available, a symptomatic passenger should be isolated there where possible, though it will not normally be possible to provide any supervision or services (meals etc.). A cabin which has been occupied by a symptomatic passenger should be cleaned after use in keeping with the *Ministry of Health - H1N1 Manual* available at <http://stlucia.gov.lc/flu/guidelines.htm>

On routes that facilitate vehicles, it might be practicable for symptomatic passengers to remain in their vehicles subject to Marine/Coast Guard approval.

If a passenger becomes seriously ill during a crossing, they should be dealt with as for any sick passenger by contacting the port health authority for assistance for advice.

Crew:

Symptomatic crew joining a ferry should be dealt with as in “crew joining a ship”, where possible it is preferable for them to be accommodated ashore and join the ferry when they become asymptomatic. However, they may be allowed onboard at the Master’s discretion, for instance if they have already commenced Oseltamivir, and preferably if they can be isolated onboard. For crew members already onboard who become ill, they should either be isolated on board or accommodated ashore and treated.

Crew Joining a Ferry

Ideally, symptomatic crew who meet the WHO case-definition of influenza-like illness (temperature $>38^{\circ}\text{C}$, and two or more symptoms of either cough, sore throat, runny nose, headache, joint/limb pain or severe illness suggestive of an infectious process) should not be allowed on board, however, this is often difficult in practice. They may be allowed on board at the Master’s discretion if they can be isolated, preferably commencing oseltamivir immediately. If it is not possible to isolate them, they will inevitably infect other crew members (unless they are immune due to previous infection, immunisation or are taking prophylactic oseltamivir).

Treatment of Symptomatic Crew

Crew members who meet the case definition for novel influenza above should be isolated immediately until they become symptom-free. If the ferry carries oseltamivir, it should be commenced immediately, unless there are underlying reasons why not. If the crew member appears seriously unwell, medical advice should be sought immediately with the presumption that they will be transferred ashore.

Notification of Illness to Port Health Authority

There is a legal requirement for the ship/ferry's master to notify cases of infectious disease to the port health authority (when arriving from a foreign port). This includes all cases of presumed influenza. Though the International Health Regulations requires notification not more than 12 hours, or less than 4 hours, before arrival, if a ship/ferry requires assistance from the shore-side public health authorities, advance notification (24 hours) is desirable.

Cancellation of Service

The cancellation/suspension of a ferry service, because of crew incapacity is a serious issue. Ferry companies should have contingency plans and prepare public statements as well as engage the Port Health Authority for such an occurrence. Further guidance is available from *NIP Volume 8 - Guidelines for the Transport Sector* at <http://www.tiny.cc/nip>

Cough Etiquette*

- Sick persons should always cover their mouth with tissue when they cough.
- This tissue should be thrown into a plastic bag, which should be tied and placed in a covered bin.
- All persons should wash their hands often. Hands should be washed with soap and running water. If persons do not have water, alcohol based hand sanitizers can be used.

For further information contact your local health practitioner.

REMEMBER – YOUR BEST DEFENSE IS YOU!