

This FAQ document has been created to keep you informed about the basic facts on H1N1 influenza (swine flu), seasonal flu, and what you can do to protect yourself and others.

Health Alert:

Seasonal & H1N1 Influenza (Swine Flu) FAQs

Q What is influenza or “flu”?

A Influenza, which is commonly called “the flu”, refers to a respiratory illness caused by a number of different influenza viruses. The infection can range in effect from mild to severe, and can cause death.

Q What are the current strains of influenza in the US?

A Two strains of flu, seasonal and H1N1 (Swine), are currently circulating in the United States. Seasonal flu is the name given to the usual influenza that circulates every fall and winter. H1N1 is a new strain of flu that emerged in Mexico last spring and was first detected in the United States in April, 2009. It has since spread throughout the world.

Q How is H1N1 similar to seasonal influenza?

A Seasonal and H1N1 flu are very similar in how they are spread, what symptoms they cause, how long the illness lasts and the kinds of complications they can cause.

Q How do H1N1 and seasonal influenza differ?

A One important way is that most people have some degree of immunity to seasonal flu from previous vaccinations or having had the illness. H1N1, on the other hand, is a new virus to which most people have no natural immunity.

Another difference is the age groups that are seriously affected: Seasonal flu is more likely to cause serious complications and death in those under age 2 and over age 65, while H1N1 seems more serious for people age 25 and under, and less so for older adults. However, both strains of virus can infect people of all ages, and both cause more serious illness in women who are pregnant, children under 5, people who are immunocompromised and those with certain chronic illness.

Q Who is susceptible to H1N1?

A It appears that susceptibility to H1N1 flu is universal among people under the age of 50. Older people seem to have some natural immunity to H1N1 but are still susceptible to seasonal influenza, which can cause severe illness in them and children under the age of 2.

Since many people have no immunity to the H1N1 virus, getting both of the vaccines is important, especially for those in high risk groups.

Q What groups are most at risk of complications if they get the flu?

A People most at risk for complications of H1N1 flu are pregnant women, children under age 5, and those who are immunocompromised or chronically ill (such as those with asthma, diabetes or lung disease and people with weakened immune systems). Seasonal influenza is risky for people over the age of 65 as well as the above groups.

The following information applies to both H1N1 and seasonal influenza.

Q When does communicability start?

A Infected persons may be contagious from the day prior to illness onset until resolution of fever. You are encouraged to stay at home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone (without the use of fever-reducing medicine). A fever is defined as having a temperature of 100 degrees Fahrenheit or 37.8 degrees Celsius or greater.

Q How long does communicability last?

A People with influenza should be considered potentially contagious as long as they have a fever and possibly for up to 7 days following illness onset.

Children, especially younger children, might potentially be contagious for longer periods.

Q How is it spread?

A Transmission of flu viruses is mainly person-to-person transmission through coughing or sneezing of people infected with the influenza virus.

People may also become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose. These objects include door handles, hand rails, counters, ATM key pads and other surfaces that you'd encounter out in the public. The virus can survive for up to 8 hours on a surface.

Q What are the symptoms?

A Generally all types of influenza usually start suddenly and may include the following symptoms:

- Fever (not always present)
- Chills
- Headache
- Tiredness (can be extreme)
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Body aches
- Diarrhea and vomiting (more common with H1N1)

Q What are the complications?

A The potentially severe complications of both H1N1 and seasonal flu include pneumonia and dehydration.

Q What are the symptoms of complications?

A In children, signs of complications that need urgent medical attention include:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Not waking up or not interacting
- Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held

- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough
- Fever with a rash

In adults, warning signs of complications that need urgent medical attention include:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting

Q Should I contact my doctor if I have symptoms?

A Unless you are in a high-risk group or have severe symptoms (listed above) you can stay at home. Keep away from other people as much as possible, especially others who are at high risk or complications from influenza.

Q What is the self-care for influenza?

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- Stay home from work or school.
 - Get lots of rest, drink plenty of liquids, and avoid using alcohol and tobacco.
 - For relief of fever in children and adults, use acetaminophen (Tylenol®) or non steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (Advil®, ibuprofen).
 - Adults can also use aspirin
 - Other over-the-counter (OTC) medications may relieve other symptoms of the flu, however:
 - Read package directions carefully
 - Follow age and dosing instructions on the package
 - Consult your doctor early on for the best treatment, but also be aware of emergency warning signs that require urgent medical attention.

MEDICATION WARNING FOR CHILDREN
DO NOT GIVE aspirin or aspirin-containing products (e.g. bismuth subsalicylate—Pepto Bismol®) to children age 18 years old and younger with confirmed or suspected influenza infection, due to the risk of causing Reye syndrome.

Q What is the medical treatment?

A Although treatment with antiviral drugs such as Tamiflu® and Relenza® is available for both seasonal and H1N1, you generally do not need it if you are in good health and have no chronic diseases. Getting both the seasonal and H1N1 vaccine prior to exposure will be the best protection you can get. Antivirals are recommended for people in high risk groups (pregnant, under age 5, immunocompromised or chronically ill) who show signs of illness, and hospitalized influenza patients.

Q How can it be prevented?

A Get vaccinated!

In addition:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve, not your hands.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hands cleaners are also effective.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread that way.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- Ill family members should use their own towel.

When washing hands with soap and water:

- Wet your hands with clean running water and apply soap. Use warm water if it is available.
- Rub hands together to make a lather and scrub all surfaces.
- Continue rubbing hands for 20 seconds. Need a timer? Imagine singing "Happy Birthday" twice through to a friend!
- Rinse hands well under running water
- Dry your hands using a paper towel or air dryer. If possible, use your paper towel to turn off the faucet and open the door

Immunization for the flu

Although the H1N1 influenza is foremost in many people's minds, seasonal influenza is a known risk and both vaccines are recommended by the CDC. The vaccines are available by both injectable (shot) and nasal mist. (Women who are pregnant or trying to conceive should get the injection, not the nasal mist.) The vaccines can be given at the same time but not in the same mist or shot.

Target groups for seasonal (available now)

- Children 6 months up to their 19th birthday
- Pregnant women
- People 50 years of age and older
- People of any age with certain chronic medical conditions
- People who live in nursing homes and other long-term care facilities
- People who live with or care for those at high risk for complications from flu, including:
 - Health care workers
 - Household contacts of persons at high risk for complications from the flu
 - Household contacts and out-of-home caregivers of children less than 6 months of age (these children are too young to be vaccinated)

Target groups for H1N1 (available in October, 2009)

- Pregnant women (any flu shot can be give at ANY time during pregnancy)
- People who live with or care for children younger than 6 months of age
- Health care and emergency medical services personnel
- All persons between the ages of 6 months and 24 years old
- People ages of 25 through 64 years of age who are at higher risk for H1N1 because of chronic health disorders or compromised immune systems.
- Healthy people ages 25 to 64 who wish to reduce their risk of the flu.

Q What if I have to stay at home?

A It's always good to be prepared for an emergency stay at home.

- Store a two-week supply of food and water.
- Have two weeks of your regular prescription drugs at home.
- Keep health supplies on hand, including pain relievers and cold medicines.

How to protect others if you/your family member become ill:

- If you get sick, CDC recommends that you stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.
- Use a face mask when caring for your sick family member and wash your hands every time you touch them or things they have touched. Limit exposure of other family members who are not ill to the one who is sick.

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Is pork safe to eat?

According to scientists at the US Department of Agriculture, H1N1 viruses are not transmitted by food so a person cannot get H1N1 flu from eating pork or pork products.

Recommendations for Supervisors:

- Instruct your staff that if they feel ill with flu symptoms, to report this to their supervisor and stay home
- If a family member in the house has the flu, instruct the worker to stay home if possible
- If they become ill at work, workers should inform the supervisor and go home
- Instruct workers who have the flu to not return to work until two days after symptoms are gone
- Urge all workers to follow the preventive precautions of frequent hand washing, covering sneezes and coughs, and avoiding personal contact with others

Where can I get more information?

Clean Hands Save Lives! (CDC)

<http://www.cdc.gov/cleanhands/>

Stopping the Spread of Germs at Work (CDC)

<http://www.cdc.gov/germstopper/work.htm>

H1N1 Flu (Swine Flu): General Information (CDC)

http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/general_info.htm

Caring for a Sick Person at Home

<http://www.flu.gov/individualfamily/caregivers/index.html>

Where You Live (shows outbreak areas)

<http://pandemicflu.gov/whereyoulive/index.html>

Pregnancy and influenza

http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/vaccination/pregnant_qa.htm