

H1N1 Influenza Information Sheet / What is novel H1N1 (swine flu)?

Novel H1N1 is a new influenza virus causing illness in people. This new virus was first detected in people in the United States in April 2009. This virus is spreading from person-to-person worldwide, probably in much the same way that regular seasonal influenza viruses spread. On June 11, 2009, the World Health Organization (WHO) signaled that a pandemic of novel H1N1 flu was underway.

Is novel H1N1 virus contagious?

H1N1 virus is contagious and is spreading from human to human.

How does novel H1N1 virus spread?

Spread of novel H1N1 virus is thought to occur in the same way that seasonal flu spreads. Flu viruses are spread mainly from person to person through coughing or sneezing by people with influenza. Sometimes people may become infected by touching something – such as a surface or object – with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose.

What are the signs and symptoms of this virus in people?

The symptoms of novel H1N1 flu virus in people include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Diarrhea and vomiting have also been reported. Severe illnesses and death has occurred as a result of illness associated with this virus.

How severe is illness associated with novel H1N1 flu virus?

Illness with the new H1N1 virus has ranged from mild to severe. While most people who have been sick have recovered without needing medical treatment, hospitalizations and deaths from infection with this virus have occurred.

In seasonal flu, usually the very young and the very old tend to get sickest. The H1N1 flu, while it can infect these age groups, tends to be most severe in children and adults under age 65. However, some groups of people are at high risk for severe illness and include **pregnant women, other previously recognized high risk medical conditions such as asthma, diabetes, suppressed immune systems, heart disease, kidney disease, neurocognitive and neuromuscular disorders**. If you are at high risk as described, you may need treatment if you become ill or are exposed to someone with H1N1.

How long can an infected person spread this virus to others?

People infected with seasonal and novel H1N1 flu shed virus and may be able to infect others from 1 day before getting sick to 5 to 7 days after. This can be longer in some people, especially children and people with weakened immune systems and in people infected with the new H1N1 virus.

What can I do to protect myself from getting sick?

A vaccine for H1N1 will be available very soon to the public. Being vaccinated against both the seasonal flu and H1N1 is an important way to prevent illness.

Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.

Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.

Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.

Try to avoid close contact with sick people.

If you are sick with flu-like illness, CDC recommends that you stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone except to get medical care or for other necessities. (Your fever should be gone without the use of a fever-reducing medicine.) Keep away from others as much as possible to keep from making others sick.

Other important actions that you can take are:

Follow public health advice regarding school closures, avoiding crowds and other social distancing measures.

Be prepared in case you get sick and need to stay home for a week or so; a supply of over-the-counter medicines, alcohol-based hand rubs, tissues and other related items will be useful and help avoid the need to make trips out in public while you are sick and contagious.

What is the best way to keep from spreading the virus through coughing or sneezing?

If you are sick, stay home until you symptoms have been gone for 24 hours.

Keep away from others as much as possible. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. Put your used tissue in the waste basket. Then, clean your hands, and do so every time you cough or sneeze. If you are in the military, you will be asked to isolate until your symptoms have been gone for 24 hours without the use of medications like acetaminophen.

If you are around others who have H1N1 or flu-like symptoms, you may go about business as usual unless instructed otherwise as long as you have no symptoms. You do NOT need to visit the ER if you have been exposed to H1N1 and are currently well and are not at risk for developing flu complications (see high risk groups above). You should monitor yourself very carefully and should stay home if you notice fever or other symptoms, until your symptoms have resolved for 24 hours. If you have severe illness or you are at high risk for flu complications, contact your health care provider or seek medical care. Your health care provider will determine whether flu testing or treatment is needed.

In children, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish or gray skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- 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.

In adults, emergency warning signs 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
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough

Are there medicines to treat novel H1N1 infection?

Yes. Osteltamivir has been effective. Your health care provider will determine whether you need this medication, and most people recover without it. However, if you or a close contact are high risk you may be treated with this medication for your illness or to prevent illness in high risk contacts.

If you have further questions about H1N1, visit www.cdc.gov, www.pandemic.gov, or www.evans.amedd.army.mil. The State of Colorado also has an information line, CoHELP, at 877-462-2911.