



H1N1/Swine Influenza (Swine Flu) 2009

12/09 Season Update

The A/H1N1 2009 influenza (flu) is a new strain of influenza virus that infects humans. The A/H1N1 flu contains genes from strains found in humans, pigs and birds. Influenza types are labeled by the letters A, B and C. The A/H1N1 (usually referred to as H1N1) is a subtype of the A influenza virus.



What are the signs and symptoms of this flu?

The signs and symptoms of the H1N1 flu are similar to any flu. You may feel any or all of the following, but usually a fever is present:

- chills
- fever
- runny nose
- tiredness
- eye irritation
- sore throat
- dry cough
- nasal congestion
- headache
- body or muscle aches
- stomach ache
- nausea
- diarrhea
- vomiting

When should I seek medical help for flu symptoms?

You should immediately seek help if you are “high risk” (high risk conditions are listed below) and have any of the following symptoms:

- difficulty breathing
- chest pain
- confusion
- severe vomiting
- dizziness or passing less urine than normal (signs you are dehydrated)

Who is high risk for getting the H1N1 flu?

High risk individuals include those:

- between 6 months and 24 years of age
- between 24 and 65 years of age who have a chronic health condition (e.g., COPD, asthma, diabetes, heart disease, AIDS)
- between 24 and 65 years of age who have a compromised immune system (e.g., people undergoing chemotherapy and certain kinds of medical conditions)
- **all** pregnant women
- people who live with or care for children under 6 month's of age (e.g., parents, daycare workers)
- healthcare and emergency medical services personnel

Can I get this flu from eating pork or pork products?

No, you cannot be infected with this virus by eating pork (swine) or pork products. Flu is spread by inhaling contaminated air or passing the virus from your hands.

How do I get this flu?

Like the seasonal flu viruses, the H1N1 virus is spread to you either by inhaling or by touching the virus. When a

person with the flu coughs or sneezes near you, you can inhale the virus in the infected air. The virus can also be spread by contact. For example, if you shake hands with a person who is ill with the flu, they may pass the flu by touching your hand. Door handles, tabletops, shopping cart handles, computer keyboards, telephones and money are examples of surfaces that may become contaminated. The virus can be picked up from these surfaces on your hands and infect you when you touch your eyes, nose or mouth. Your hands are an important way of getting and passing on the virus. Wash your hands well and often.

Can wearing a mask help prevent me from getting the flu?

Face masks *alone* have limited value in protecting you from the flu if you also do not take precautions to wash your hands frequently. Masks might decrease your exposure to the flu for a short period of time, but after a while, the mask is no longer effective. Viruses like warm, moist places. When a mask gets moist from your breath, the virus can stick to your mask. **For this reason, masks should be changed regularly.**

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) Website (www.cdc.gov) offers current information about masks for use during the flu season. Learn more about disposable respirators in the ATS Patient Information Series Fact Sheet “Using a Disposable Respirator”.

How can I protect myself from getting this flu?

During outbreaks of any type of flu, avoid close contact with others. Close contact is considered less than three feet away from a person. Staying at least six (6) feet away from a person who sneezes or coughs may be a safe distance. During the flu season, those at high risk should have limited contact with people and avoid crowded places.

Viruses can remain alive for 2-8 hours after they land on any surface. Whenever you touch these surfaces, wash your hands well with warm soapy water for at least 20 seconds. Alcohol-based liquid or foam sanitizers also kill viruses on contact. Scrub with the sanitizer until all of the liquid is gone.

Is there a vaccine to protect me from getting the H1N1 Flu?

Yes, H1N1 vaccines were made available in the United States beginning in October 2009. The CDC recommends that all individuals in high-risk groups receive H1N1 vaccine.

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Children under 6 months of age are too young to receive the H1N1 vaccination. Children between 6 months and 9 years of age will need **two** vaccinations, separated by at least 21 days.

According to the CDC, individuals who are allergic to eggs may experience a severe allergic reaction from the H1N1 vaccination. If you are allergic to eggs, you should speak with your health care provider. Tell your health care provider if you have ever had a serious allergic reaction after a dose of seasonal flu vaccine.

How is the H1N1 vaccine given?

The H1N1 vaccine can be given either by injection into the arm or as a nasal mist. However, as with seasonal flu vaccines, the nasal mist is not recommended for individuals with respiratory conditions such as COPD or asthma. Like the seasonal flu vaccine, getting this vaccine does not guarantee you will not get the flu, but it may prevent you from getting H1N1 or reduce your symptoms from H1N1. You can receive both the H1N1 vaccine by injection AND the seasonal flu injectable vaccine during the same visit. Seasonal flu and H1N1 nasal mist vaccines however, may not be given together during the same visit.

You cannot get H1N1 from the injection. Reactions to the H1N1 injection are similar to those that may be experienced from the seasonal flu vaccine. These reactions include redness, swelling and soreness (at the injection site), headache, muscle ache, fatigue, fever or nausea. There have also been reports of fainting following the vaccine, primarily in teens. Side effects of the nasal mist vaccine, which uses a live attenuated virus, include sore throat, runny nose, congestion and fever. (Attenuated means the virus is weakened so it can trigger your immune system to fight the H1N1 flu without causing you to be sick.) Severe side effects may include an allergic reaction resulting in dizziness, difficulty breathing, hives, paleness, weakness or rapid heartbeat. Contact your healthcare provider if you experience any of these symptoms, or if you develop a high fever and behavior changes, such as confusion, following the vaccine.

Do I still need to get the seasonal flu vaccine if I have received the H1N1?

There are two vaccines for different types of flu this year—one for H1N1 and one for the seasonal flu A and B strains. Only the H1N1 vaccine will protect you from the H1N1 virus, and only the seasonal flu vaccine will protect you from the seasonal flu viruses. If you want to be protected from both H1N1 and the seasonal flu strains, you will need two separate vaccines.

Are there drugs I can take to treat this flu?

Certain drugs, called antiviral drugs, can help you fight the H1N1 flu if you become infected. These drugs are believed to work best if they are started within 48 hours of getting the flu. Even if taken after 48 hours, the drug may decrease the seriousness of your symptoms. If you are at high risk, you may wish to discuss with your healthcare provider whether you should have one of these drugs on hand in case you develop the flu. Do not delay in calling your health care provider, however, if you develop a fever and flu symptoms. The most common antiviral drugs are oseltamivir (Tamiflu®)

and zanamivir (Relenza®). These drugs are only available by prescription.

How can I protect others if I have the flu?

If you experience flu-like symptoms including fever, it is recommended that you stay home for 24 hours after your fever goes away (without the use of fever-reducing medication). The virus can be spread to others from within 24 hours before developing symptoms up to 1 week after your symptoms start. If you have the flu, you should stay home until at least 24 hours after the fever has ended. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue every time you sneeze or cough, and dispose of the tissues immediately, Wash your hands frequently, especially after sneezing or coughing. Masks are helpful in slowing the spread of the flu. If you have the flu and wear a mask you are less likely to infect others. Good hand washing is a key to preventing spread.

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Additional Flu Information

American Thoracic Society—see publications on the flu and respirators at

www.thoracic.org

Patient Information Series: Influenza-the-flu-2009

Patient Information Series: Disposable Respirators

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

www.cdc.gov

United States Government Flu Resource

www.flu.gov

National Library of Medicine

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/swineflu.html>

World Health Organization

www.who.int/topics/influenza/en/

Rx What to do...

- ✓ avoid contact with anyone known to have a fever or symptoms of the flu
- ✓ cover your nose and mouth when you cough or sneeze
- ✓ wash your hands well and often with either soap and water or an alcohol-based liquid or foam sanitizer
- ✓ if you are having fever and symptoms of the flu, ask your health care provider right away if you need to be tested and take an antiviral medicine. Avoid contact with others until 24 hours after your fever is gone.
- ✓ get immediate medical attention if you are having severe symptoms such as difficulty breathing, or you become confused, dizzy, dehydrated or cannot stop vomiting or cannot keep liquids down

Doctor's Office Telephone: