



H1N1 (SWINE FLU)

What is 2009 H1N1 (swine flu)?

2009 H1N1 (sometimes called “swine flu”) is a new influenza virus similar to the seasonal influenza we are all familiar with. 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. It has been more concerning in the media and considered to be a “pandemic” not because of how severe the illness is, but because of how far it is spreading and the number of people affected.

What are the signs and symptoms of this virus?

The symptoms of 2009 H1N1 flu in people include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people may have vomiting and diarrhea. People may be infected with the flu, including H1N1, and have respiratory symptoms without a fever. The symptoms of the swine flu are often hard to tell apart from the symptoms of other similar seasonal flu infections.

How severe is illness associated with H1N1 flu virus?

Illness has ranged from very mild to severe. Most people who have been sick have had mild illness and have recovered without needing medical treatment. Hospitalizations and deaths have sometimes occurred in those infected with H1N1 but at no higher rates than with seasonal influenza and mostly in those with underlying high risk conditions. These underlying conditions include pregnancy, asthma, diabetes, suppressed immune systems, heart disease and kidney disease. Most of the hospitalizations and deaths due to this flu strain are due to bacterial infections such as pneumonia that can occur alongside the flu when the immune system is down

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

People infected with seasonal and 2009 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.

How can I best protect myself from getting the flu?

- Wash your hands often with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- Follow our recommendations in our flu handout for preventive measures and supplements to support the immune system.
- If you are sick with a 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.

Who should receive the H1N1 flu vaccine?

CDC has recommended that certain groups of people receive the H1N1 vaccine as a priority. These target groups include pregnant women, people who live with or care for children younger than 6 months of age, healthcare and emergency medical personnel, persons between the 6 months and 24 years old, and people age 25 through 64 years of age who are at higher risk for H1N1 because of chronic health disorders or compromised immune systems. The CDC is recommending all others to consider getting the H1N1 vaccine as well, as long as the supply is sufficient. People over age 65 are not currently being offered the vaccine since they are not at a high risk of getting the infection. This is because most people above age 65 have already been exposed to this virus in the past and therefore have immunity.

Whether or not you get the swine flu vaccine (or the seasonal flu vaccine for that matter) is a personal choice. It should be weighed on a number of factors including: do you have any other medical conditions like pregnancy, asthma, diabetes, heart disease, etc; what are your philosophical opinions on vaccines in general; what is your comfort in dealing with an illness and/or can you afford to get the flu.

If I get sick should I get tested to see if I have H1N1?

Not necessarily. Currently, specific testing for H1N1 is only done for those being hospitalized. Testing for Influenza A is sometimes being performed at urgent care offices and can confirm a case of the flu but will not differentiate between seasonal or H1N1 flu.

If you have flu symptoms you are encouraged to stay home, treat yourself as if you have the flu and seek medical care only if needed for more severe symptoms. The flu will be treated the same no matter whether seasonal influenza, H1N1 or a similar flu virus. If you do start to have symptoms of the flu, refer to our flu treatment handout which offers a variety of effective means of treating and preventing the flu and seek medical care if your symptoms become severe.

Who should be treated with antiviral medications for the flu?

Antiviral medication such as Tamiflu can be used to both prevent flu illness in those exposed and treat the flu if symptoms develop and influenza is confirmed. To be effective, these medicines must be started as early as possible when symptoms arise (within 48 hrs) and have been shown to only decrease symptoms of flu by about 24 hrs. Antiviral medications can, however, be effective in preventing the flu in people who are exposed and also can lower the risk of complications of the flu. This medication is currently being reserved only for those who are in certain high risk groups including pregnant women, children younger than 2 years old, people age 65 years or older, people of any age with certain chronic medical conditions or suppressed immune systems. If you fall into one of these groups and are exposed to the flu of any type or if you begin to get flu symptoms, then contact our office to discuss this option.

For information on the H1N1 flu from the CDC, visit:
<http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/qa.htm>

We welcome you to visit our website at: www.familytofamily.org to access links to various resources on the flu and the controversies surrounding it.