

H1N1 Influenza Frequently Asked Questions

April 30, 2009

What is H1N1 flu, commonly known as swine flu?

The current flu virus of concern is the H1N1 virus, commonly referred to as swine flu. Swine flu is a respiratory disease of pigs caused by type A influenza viruses. Outbreaks of swine flu happen regularly in pigs. People do not normally get swine flu, but human infections can and do happen. Most commonly, human cases of swine flu happen in people who are around pigs but it's possible for swine flu viruses to spread from person to person which has occurred with the H1N1 virus.

Are there human infections with H1N1 flu in the U.S.?

In late March and early April 2009, cases of human infection with influenza A H1N1 viruses were first reported in Southern California and near San Antonio, Texas. New cases continue to be confirmed daily. For updated information on cases visit the CDC website at www.cdc.gov. CDC and local and state health agencies are working together to investigate this situation.

Is this H1N1 flu virus contagious?

CDC has determined that this virus is contagious and is spreading from human to human. However, at this time, it not known how easily the virus spreads between people.

What are the signs and symptoms of H1N1 flu in people?

The symptoms of H1N1 flu in people are similar to the symptoms of regular human flu and include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people have reported diarrhea and vomiting associated with swine flu. In the past, severe illness (pneumonia and respiratory failure) and deaths have been reported with other swine flu infections in people. Like seasonal flu, H1N1 flu may cause a worsening of underlying chronic medical conditions.

How serious is H1N1 flu infection?

Like seasonal flu, H1N1 flu in humans can vary in severity from mild to severe. Between 2005 until January 2009, 12 human cases of H1N1 flu were detected in the U.S. with no deaths occurring. However, H1N1 flu infection can be serious. In September 1988, a previously healthy 32-year-old pregnant woman in Wisconsin was hospitalized for pneumonia after being infected with swine flu and died 8 days later. A swine flu outbreak in Fort Dix, New Jersey occurred in 1976 that caused more than 200 cases with serious illness in several people and one death.

Will the seasonal flu vaccine protect against H1N1 flu?

H1N1 flu is a specific type of flu which was not included in this year's seasonal flu vaccine. Therefore, the seasonal flu vaccine will not provide protection against the current form of H1N1 flu.

How long can an infected person spread H1N1 flu to others?

People with H1N1 influenza virus infection should be considered potentially contagious as long as they are symptomatic and up to 7 days following illness onset. Children, especially younger children, might potentially be contagious for longer periods.

What surfaces are most likely to be sources of contamination?

Germs can be spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose, or mouth. Droplets from a cough or sneeze of an infected person move

through the air. Germs can be spread when a person touches respiratory droplets from another person on a surface like a desk and then touches their own eyes, mouth or nose before washing their hands.

How long can viruses live outside the body?

We know that some viruses and bacteria can live 2 hours or longer on surfaces like cafeteria tables, doorknobs, and desks. Frequent handwashing will help you reduce the chance of getting contamination from these common surfaces.

Are there medicines to treat H1N1 flu?

Antiviral medications can sometimes help lessen influenza symptoms, but require a prescription. Most people do not need these antiviral drugs to fully recover from the flu. However, persons at higher risk for severe flu complications, or those with severe flu illness who require hospitalization, might benefit from antiviral medications. CDC recommends the use of oseltamivir (Tamiflu) or zanamivir (Relenza) for the treatment of infection with these H1N1 influenza viruses. Antiviral drugs are prescription medicines (pills, liquid or an inhaler) that fight against the flu by keeping flu viruses from reproducing in your body. Antiviral drugs can make your illness milder and make you feel better faster. They may also prevent serious flu complications. In some instances, antivirals may also be given to prevent illness. Ask your healthcare provider whether you need antiviral medication.

What can I do to protect myself from getting sick?

There is no vaccine available right now to protect against H1N1 flu. There are everyday actions that can help prevent the spread of germs that cause respiratory illnesses like influenza. Take these everyday steps to protect your health:

- 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 and before eating. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- If you get sick with influenza, CDC recommends that you stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them. Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.

Should people wear masks?

CDC has developed interim guidance on the use of face masks and respirators. Detailed information on the guidance can be found at the [CDC website](#). In areas with confirmed human cases of H1N1 influenza A (H1N1) virus infection, the risk for infection can be reduced through a combination of simple actions. No single action will provide complete protection, but an approach combining the following steps can help decrease the likelihood of transmission. These actions include frequent handwashing, covering coughs, and having ill persons stay home, except to seek medical care, and minimize contact with others in the household. Additional measures that can limit transmission of a new influenza strain include voluntary home quarantine of members of households with confirmed or probable H1N1 influenza cases, reduction of unnecessary social contacts, and avoidance whenever possible of crowded settings. When it is absolutely necessary to have close contact with persons who might be ill, the time spent in that setting should be as short as possible. If used correctly, facemasks and respirators can help prevent some exposures, but they should be used along with other preventive measures, such as avoiding close contact and maintaining good hand hygiene.

What should I do if I get sick?

If you become ill with influenza-like symptoms, including fever, body aches, runny nose, sore throat,

nausea, or vomiting or diarrhea, you may want to contact their health care provider, particularly if you are worried about your symptoms. Your health care provider will determine whether influenza testing or treatment is needed.

If you are sick, you should stay home and avoid contact with other people as much as possible to keep from spreading your illness to others.

If you become ill and experience any of the following warning signs, seek emergency medical care.

In children emergency warning signs 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, 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

Can I get H1N1 influenza from eating or preparing pork?

No. H1N1 influenza viruses are not spread by food. You cannot get H1N1 influenza from eating pork or pork products. Eating properly handled and cooked pork products is safe.

Should I restrict travel to locations where H1N1 flu is present?

CDC has recommended that people avoid non-essential travel to Mexico at this time. If you are planning travel, check the [CDC's Traveler's Health](#) website for travel recommendations and guidelines.

Should I keep my child home from school?

Unless your child is ill or there are confirmed cases in your child's school or daycare, your child can still attend school. The Health District will be working very closely with schools and will provide guidance on school closures. As with any illness, proper handwashing and covering coughs and sneezes should be stressed with school age children.

If you have specific questions that have not been answered you can contact the ODH H1N1 Flu Hotline at 866-800-1404.