

Novel H1N1 Flu: The Basics

What is novel H1N1 flu?

Novel H1N1 (called “swine flu” early on) is a new influenza virus that first caused illness in the United States in April 2009. The novel H1N1 virus is contagious and is spreading from human to human. Symptoms are similar to the symptoms of seasonal flue.

How is H1N1 flu spread?

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

How long can influenza virus remain viable on objects?

Studies have shown that influenza virus can survive on environmental surfaces such as doorknobs and books and can infect a person for up to 2-8 hours after being deposited on the surface. To reduce the chance of spread of the flu in workplace areas that have been exposed to the novel H1N1 virus, disinfect commonly touched hard surfaces such as light switches, counter tops, door knobs, and bathroom surfaces by wiping them down with a household disinfectant according to directions on the product label.

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

People infected with seasonal and novel H1N1 flu virus may be able to infect others from 1 day before getting sick to 5 to 7 days after. CDC recommends that infected people stay home for at least 24 hours after their fever is gone (without the use of fever-reducing medicine).

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms of the novel H1N1 flu virus in people are similar to the symptoms of seasonal flu and include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. A significant number of people who have been infected with this virus also have reported diarrhea and vomiting. Also, as with seasonal flu, severe illnesses and death have occurred as a result of illness associated with this virus.

Is there a vaccine available?

There is no vaccine available right now to protect against novel H1N1 virus. However, a novel H1N1 vaccine is in production and may be ready for the public in the fall. As always, a vaccine will be available to protect against seasonal influenza.

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What everyday actions can people take to protect their and other's health?

There are everyday actions that can help prevent the spread of germs that cause respiratory illnesses like influenza:

- 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, stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone. Keep away from others as much as possible to keep from making others sick.
 - Follow public health advice regarding school closures, avoiding crowds and other social distancing measures.
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What is the best technique for washing my hands to avoid getting the flu?

Washing your hands often will help protect you from germs. Wash with soap and water or clean with alcohol-based hand cleaner. CDC recommends that when you wash your hands -- with soap and warm water -- that you wash for 15 to 20 seconds. When soap and water are not available, alcohol-based disposable hand wipes or gel sanitizers may be used. You can find them in most supermarkets and drugstores. If using gel, rub your hands until the gel is dry. The gel doesn't need water to work; the alcohol in it kills the germs on your hands

What kills influenza virus?

Influenza virus is destroyed by heat (167-212°F [75-100°C]). In addition, several chemical germicides, including chlorine, hydrogen peroxide, detergents (soap), iodophors (iodine-based antiseptics), and alcohols are effective against human influenza viruses if used in proper concentration for a sufficient length of time. For example, wipes or gels with alcohol in them can be used to clean hands. The gels should be rubbed into hands until they are dry.

How should waste disposal be handled?

To prevent the spread of influenza virus, it is recommended that tissues and other disposable items used by an infected person be thrown in the trash. Additionally, persons should wash their hands with soap and water after touching used tissues and similar waste.

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What should I do if I get sick?

If you live in areas where H1N1 flu cases have been identified and become ill with influenza-like symptoms, including fever, body aches, runny nose, sore throat, nausea, or vomiting or diarrhea, contact your health care provider, particularly if you are worried about your symptoms. Your health care provider will determine whether flu testing or treatment is needed.

If you are sick, stay home and avoid contact with others 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 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. CDC recommends the use of antiviral prescription medicines such as Tamiflu® that fight against the flue 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 flue complications.

For more information

For more information on novel H1N1 flu, visit:

- Center for Disease Control (CDC) – <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/>
 - U.S. Department of Health & Human Services – www.flu.gov
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