

PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET

H1N1 Flu (Swine Flu)

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What is H1N1 influenza?

H1N1 flu, also known as “swine flu,” is a respiratory disease caused by a type of influenza virus. There are several different types of the “H1N1” flu virus. One type causes illness in pigs. Another type causes illness in people. (Occasionally, the H1N1 virus from pigs can cause illness in humans and the H1N1 virus from pigs can cause disease in humans.) Recently, a new type of H1N1 flu has been found to cause illness in people. Since March 2009, there have been many cases of this new type of H1N1 flu in the United States and around the world.

What are the symptoms of the new H1N1 flu in people?

The new H1N1 flu causes symptoms very similar to seasonal flu. Just like seasonal flu, the most common symptoms are fever, cough, and sore throat. They can also include body aches, headache, chills and feeling very tired. Some people also have diarrhea and vomiting.

How would I know if I have the new H1N1 flu?

If you have symptoms of influenza, contact your healthcare provider. He or she will decide what type of testing (if any) and treatment is right for you. Most people who are otherwise healthy, and who have mild illness, do not need to be tested. Your healthcare provider may recommend testing if you are very ill or have a high risk of complications with influenza (for example if you are over 65, immunosuppressed, or chronically ill). If you think you might have H1N1 or seasonal flu and you need to see your health care provider, you should call ahead and let them know you might have the flu. That way, precautions can be taken to avoid the spread of flu to others.

How is the new H1N1 flu treated?

People sick with any type of flu should make sure to drink enough fluids, get plenty of rest, eat healthy foods, wash hands frequently and stay home to avoid spreading the flu to other people. Drugs used to treat seasonal flu, called antivirals, can also be used to treat the new H1N1 flu. A few influenza viruses, including H1N1, have been resistant to some, but not all, of these drugs. Healthcare providers may recommend that people who are sick with a flu-like illness receive an antiviral medication.

What if I live in or have recently been to an area where the new H1N1 flu in humans has been found?

If you live in or have recently traveled to an area affected by H1N1 flu, be watchful for any flu-like symptoms. If you are experiencing any symptoms, stay home to avoid exposing others. Contact your healthcare provider and he or she will decide what type of testing (if any) and treatment is right for you.

Is there a vaccine for the new H1N1 flu?

Right now there is no vaccine to protect against H1N1 influenza. According to U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), it is unlikely that the vaccine for seasonal flu will prevent the new H1N1 flu. However, the federal government is working with vaccine manufacturers to develop a vaccine that is expected to be available in several months.

How can I protect myself and others from the new H1N1 flu?

You can protect yourself and others from the new H1N1 flu the same way that you protect yourself from seasonal flu. Avoid holding, hugging, kissing, or shaking hands with anyone who has a cold or the flu. Wash your hands often with soap and warm water, or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Avoid touching your nose, mouth or eyes. Clean things that are touched often like door handles, telephones, faucets, etc. **If you get sick with a flu-like illness stay home from work and school and avoid contact with others so the virus does not spread.**

All people with the new H1N1 flu and flu-like illness who are not hospitalized should stay at home to prevent spread of illness to other people.

People who have flu-like illness should do the following while recovering at home:

- Check with your health care provider(s) about any special care you might need if you are pregnant, immunosuppressed, or have a health condition such as diabetes, heart disease, asthma, or emphysema..
- Check with your health care provider about whether or not you should take antiviral medications.
- **Stay home for at least 7 days after onset of illness; or until free of symptoms (including fever) for 24 hours, which ever is longer.** Avoid close contact with others as much as possible, even at home.
- Identify a single household member as the ill person's caregiver to minimize interactions with others.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Drink clear fluids (such as water, broth, sports drinks, or electrolyte beverages for infants) to keep from getting dehydrated.
- Cover coughs and sneezes.
- Clean hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer often and especially after using tissues and after coughing or sneezing into hands.
- Never cough or sneeze in the direction of someone else.
- Be watchful for emergency warning signs (see below) that might mean you need to seek medical attention.

Get medical care right away if the sick person at home:

- Has difficulty breathing or chest pain
- Has purple or blue discoloration of the lips
- Is vomiting and unable to keep liquids down
- Has signs of dehydration such as dizziness when standing, absence of urination, or in infants, a lack of tears when they cry
- Has seizures (for example, uncontrolled convulsions), is less responsive than normal or becomes confused

If someone in my house is sick, but I'm not, do I need to stay home?

You do not need to stay home or out of school if you are not sick. However, it is recommended that you limit unnecessary contact with other people as much as possible. If you start feeling sick, especially with fever, cough, sore throat and feeling tired, you should stay at home and minimize contact with others as much as possible.

Is it safe to cook and eat pork and pork products?

Yes. It is safe to eat properly handled and cooked pork and pork products. Influenza viruses are not spread by food. You cannot get H1N1 from eating pork or pork products.

For more information about seasonal flu, pandemic flu, avian flu and H1N1, please visit the websites listed below or contact the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Division of Epidemiology and Immunization at 617-983-6800.

- **Massachusetts Department of Public Health website on influenza**
<http://www.mass.gov/dph/swineflu>
- **Center for Disease Control (CDC) websites on H1N1**
<http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/>