

# Flu Frequently Asked Questions

## **What are the symptoms of H1N1 flu?**

Symptoms are similar to those for seasonal influenza. Those symptoms include:

- Fever over 100° F
- Cough and/or sore throat
- Body aches and headache.
- In addition, fatigue, lack of appetite, runny nose, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea can occur.

## **Who is at risk and should contact a doctor if they have these symptoms?**

- Children under 2 years old
- Pregnant women
- Adults over 65 years old
- Residents of long-term care facilities
- People with chronic lung, heart, kidney or liver disease
- People with diabetes
- People with sickle cell anemia
- People with immunosuppression or receiving chemotherapy for cancer
- Anyone with fever and severe respiratory symptoms such as shortness of breath or difficulty breathing should contact their healthcare provider.

## **How long should people with flu-like illness stay home?**

People with flu symptoms should keep away from others as much as possible (do not travel, go to school, go to work, etc.) for at least 24 hours after the fever is gone without the use of fever-reducing medicine.

- This guidance does **not** apply to health care settings where the exclusion period should be continued for 7 days from symptom onset or until the resolution of symptoms, whichever is longer.
- Sick individuals should stay at home until the end of the exclusion period, to the extent possible, except when necessary to seek required medical care.
- CDC recommends this exclusion period regardless of whether or not antiviral medications are used.

## **How do people catch H1N1?**

You can become infected by the H1N1 virus when someone infected with H1N1 coughs or sneezes, releasing droplets carrying the virus near you. You can then take in the virus through your mouth, nose or eyes. You can also get the virus by touching a surface such as a countertop or doorknob that has become contaminated and then touching your mouth, nose or eyes.

## **How long are people contagious?**

Infected people can infect others beginning 1 day before symptoms start and up to 7 or more days after becoming sick. That means that you may be able to pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick. Children, especially younger children, might potentially be contagious for longer periods.

## **How long can you be infected without showing symptoms/getting sick?**

Not all infected people get sick but, if an infected person develops symptoms, it usually happens 1-7 days after infection.

### ***Should I wear a mask?***

A facemask or respirator may be considered, specifically for persons at increased risk of severe illness from influenza.

- Facemasks help stop droplets from being spread by the person wearing them. They do not protect against breathing in very small particle aerosols that may contain viruses. Facemasks should be used once and then thrown away in the trash.
- A respirator that fits snugly on the face can filter out virus-containing small particle aerosols that can be generated by an infected person, but compared with a facemask it is harder to breathe through a respirator for long periods of time. Respirators are not recommended for children or people who have facial hair.
- Neither a facemask nor a respirator will give complete protection from the flu. That is why it is important to wash your hands often, cover your coughs and sneezes with a handkerchief or your arm, and avoid crowds and gatherings during a pandemic.

### ***How long can the H1N1 virus live on a countertop or other surface?***

The virus can live on hard surfaces for at least several hours and possibly more than a day. For that reason, it is important that you wash your hands after coughing or sneezing to avoid passing on the virus.

### ***How do I clean to get rid of influenza viruses?***

To prevent the spread of influenza virus it is important to keep surfaces (especially bedside tables, surfaces in the bathroom, kitchen counters and toys for children) clean by wiping them down with a household disinfectant according to directions on the product label.

### ***Where do I get tested for H1N1?***

Individuals are no longer being tested for H1N1, because we know it is already in our community, and we no longer need to track it geographically. However, hospitalized patients with flu-like illness are being tested for it because what we are now trying to determine is if it is causing more serious illness, hospitalizations or deaths.

### ***How should linens, eating utensils and dishes of persons infected with influenza virus be handled?***

- Linens, eating utensils and dishes belonging to those who are sick do not need to be cleaned separately, but these items should be washed thoroughly before being used by anyone else. Linens (such as bed sheets and towels) should be washed by using household laundry soap and tumbled dry on a hot setting. To avoid contaminating themselves, individuals should transport dirty laundry in a bag or other container rather than handling it closely or for a prolonged period. Individuals should wash their hands with soap and water or alcohol-based hand rub immediately after handling dirty laundry.
- Eating utensils should be washed either in a dishwasher or by hand with water and soap.

### ***If I have the flu, should I breast-feed my baby?***

- Avoid contact with your baby until you have been on antiviral medicine for 48 hours, have not had a fever for 24 hours and you can control your coughs and sneezes. During this time, you do not have to stop breast-feeding. We encourage you to pump and have someone who is not ill feed breast milk to your baby until you can handle your baby without the risk of infection again.
- Once you have been cleared to have contact with your baby, please wear a mask and change into clean clothes until 7 days after the flu-like symptoms began to keep from spreading this new virus to your baby.

***What if I have the flu and don't have anyone else who can take care of my baby?***

If you are sick and there is no one else to care for your baby, wear a facemask, if available and tolerable, and cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing.

***Is it ok to take medicine to treat or prevent flu while I am breast-feeding?***

Yes.

***If my baby is sick, is it ok to breast-feed?***

Yes. One of the best things you can do for your sick baby is keep breast-feeding.

- Give your baby many chances to breastfeed throughout the illness. Babies who are sick need more fluids than when they are well.
- If your baby is too sick to breastfeed, he or she can drink your milk from a cup, bottle, syringe, or eye-dropper.

***What should people with HIV/AIDS do if they have flu symptoms?***

HIV-infected people should do the same things as they would do for routine seasonal flu – contact your health care provider and follow his or her instructions.

***When will H1N1 vaccine be available?***

The earliest we expect to receive a supply is in mid-October. It is possible that limited supplies of the vaccine will mean that those most at risk of severe infections will be first to get vaccinated. More information about when the vaccine will be available and who will get it will be publicized as soon as more is known.

***Can the seasonal flu shot protect me against H1N1?***

No. But it is important to get a seasonal flu shot to help you avoid getting a co-infection and to limit opportunities for the H1N1 virus to become resistant to antiviral medications.

***Can I get the seasonal flu shot and the H1N1 shot at the same time?***

Yes, although the seasonal flu shot is expected to be available earlier than the H1N1 vaccine, and the CDC recommends getting the seasonal flu shot as soon as it is available.

***How will H1N1 vaccine be administered?***

For now, it is expected to be administered in two injections given 21 days apart. An aerosol (mist) vaccine is also being developed, but people with certain underlying health conditions will not be able to take it. Also, as more is known about the vaccine, administration guidelines may change.

***Where can I get H1N1 vaccine?***

Local public health officials are working with a variety of partners to make the vaccine available in a variety of settings. Once details are finalized, the locations for the vaccine will be heavily publicized.

***What will the H1N1 vaccine cost?***

The federal government is providing it at no charge. However, in some settings, administration fees will be charged.

***Will the H1N1 vaccinations be mandatory?***

No.

***What are antivirals?***

They are prescription medicines (pills, liquid or an inhaled powder) that fight against the flu by keeping flu viruses from reproducing in your body.

- If you get sick, antiviral drugs can make your illness milder and make you feel better faster.
- They may also prevent serious flu complications.

***Can't I just take antivirals if I get exposed to the flu?***

Antivirals are being recommended for treatment of H1N1, not for prophylaxis (to prevent symptoms) except for individuals who are high risk of complications (hospitalization or death) from the flu.

***What antivirals are approved for use against Pandemic H1N1 flu?***

CDC recommends the use of oseltamivir or zanamivir for the treatment and/or prevention of infection with swine influenza viruses. However, some strains of H1N1 flu have been found to be resistant to oseltamivir (Tamiflu®).

- Oseltamivir (brand name Tamiflu®) is approved to both treat and prevent influenza A and B virus infection in people one year of age and older.
- Zanamivir (brand name Relenza®) is approved to treat influenza A and B virus infection in people 7 years and older and to prevent influenza A and B virus infection in people 5 years and older.
- Recommendations for using antiviral drugs for treatment or prevention of swine influenza will change as we learn more about this new virus.

***Can I get swine flu from eating pork or ham?***

No, you cannot get H1N1 flu in that way. H1N1 is passed from person to person through coughing or sneezing, or by touching a surface that an infected person has coughed or sneezed on and then touching your mouth, nose or eyes.

***I am in contact with pigs. Can I catch the flu from them?***

Yes. The H1N1 virus has been found in pigs in other countries, including Canada. To prevent flu viruses from spreading between people and pigs, it is important for people working with pigs to recognize the signs of flu in pigs. Typically a combination of signs will occur together in infected pigs. Signs of flu in pigs can include any of the following:

- Sudden onset of fever
- Lethargy, lack of alertness
- Going off feed (poor appetite)
- Coughing (barking)
- Discharge from the nose or eyes, eye redness or inflammation
- Sneezing
- Breathing difficulty

***If pigs I am around have flu symptoms, what should I do?***

- If a pig is showing these signs, even mildly, you should call your veterinarian.
- Do not allow sick pigs to enter your farm or facility and do not move sick pigs off your property.

***Is there a risk from drinking water?***

Tap water that has been treated by conventional disinfection processes does not likely pose a risk for transmission of influenza viruses.