



Waukesha County Public Health Division

What You Need to Know About 2009 H1N1 Flu (originally called Swine Flu)

What is 2009 H1N1 (swine) flu?

2009 H1N1 is a new virus causing illness in people. This new virus was first detected in people in the United States in April 2009. The virus is spreading worldwide. In June 2009, the World Health Organization (WHO) determined that 2009 H1N1 flu was pandemic (i.e. **a new strain of influenza virus** that spreads around the world, infecting many people at once). Early on, this virus was referred to a “swine flu” because many of the genes in this new virus were similar to influenza viruses that normally occur in pigs (swine) in North America. Further study has shown that this new virus is very different. It has a combination of genes of flu viruses from pigs, and bird (avian) and human genes.

How does 2009 H1N1 virus spread?

2009 H1N1 virus is contagious and spreads from human to human similar to seasonal flu. Flu viruses **spread mainly from person to person** through coughing or sneezing by people with influenza. Sometimes people may become infected by touching something – such as a surface or object – with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose.

What are the signs and symptoms of 2009 H1N1 virus in people?

The symptoms of 2009 H1N1 flu virus include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, chills and fatigue. A significant amount of people have also reported diarrhea and vomiting.

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

People infected with 2009 H1N1 and seasonal flu may be able to infect others from 1 day before getting sick to 5 to 7 days after becoming sick.

How severe is illness with 2009 H1N1 flu virus?

Illness with the new H1N1 virus has ranged from mild to severe. While most people who have been sick have recovered without needing medical treatment, hospitalizations and deaths from flu infections have occurred. Studies done so far show **certain groups of people are at higher risk for serious illness** from 2009 H1N1 virus. These groups are:

- All people from 6 months through 24 years of age
- Pregnant women
- People of any age with certain medical conditions, such as heart or lung disease (asthma, COPD, emphysema), diabetes, suppressed or weakened immune systems, kidney disease, and neuromuscular and neurocognitive disorders

What can I do to protect myself from getting sick?

A 2009 H1N1 vaccine is currently being produced and will be ready for the public in the fall. As always, a vaccine will be available to protect against seasonal influenza. There are **actions that can help prevent the spread of germs** that cause respiratory illnesses like influenza (H1N1 and seasonal):

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue or the inside of your elbow 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 if soap and water are not available.
- 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, CDC recommends you stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone without the use of fever-reducing medication. Keep away from others as much as possible to avoid making others sick.

Another **important action** that you can take:

- If schools or daycares are closed, please keep children at home and have them avoid crowds.

Is there medicine or vaccines available for the 2009 H1N1 flu?

There are prescription antiviral drugs that fight against the flu by keeping the flu from reproducing in your body. CDC recommends the use of oseltamivir (Tamiflu®) or zanamivir (Relenza®) for treatment and/or prevention of infection. They may also prevent serious flu complications. Persons at risk for flu complications should talk to their health care provider about antivirals.

A vaccine is currently being produced and is expected to be available in October 2009. The vaccine will be given first to those at greatest risk for complications from the flu.

CDC's recommendations for these target groups are:

- Pregnant women
- All people 6 months through 24 years of age
- People ages 24 through 64 years with certain medical conditions
- People who live with or care for children younger than 6 months
- Health care and emergency services personnel

What should I do if I have symptoms of H1N1?

Most individuals who are sick with H1N1 flu may be safely cared for at home. While staying home from work, school, and childcare the following information can help you:

- Check with your health care provider 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.
- Keep away from others as much as possible to avoid making others sick. CDC recommends you stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone without the use of a fever-reducing medicine.
- Identify a single household member as the ill person's caregiver to minimize interactions with others.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Drink clear fluids to keep from getting dehydrated. Examples are water, broth, sports drinks, or electrolyte beverages for infants and children.
- Cover coughs and sneezes.
- Clean hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand cleaner often and especially after coughing or sneezing and using tissues.
- Never cough or sneeze in the direction of someone else.
- Be watchful for emergency signs and get care right away if you experience any of the following:
 - Difficulty breathing, shortness of breath or chest pain
 - Purple or blue discoloration of lips
 - Severe vomiting or unable to keep liquids down
 - Signs of dehydration such as dizziness when standing, no urination, dry mouth, or a lack of tears in infants when they cry
 - Seizures/convulsions, feel confused or are less responsive than normal
 - Flu-like symptoms that worsen over time
 - Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough

What should I do if someone in my home has the flu?

If you are feeling well, you can go to work or school but should monitor your health everyday. However, limit unnecessary contact with other people as much as possible. Anyone who starts to feel ill at work or school should notify their supervisor or teacher and go home right away. If you have an underlying medical condition, are pregnant or are having severe symptoms, contact your health care provider for advice regarding testing and/or treatment.

If you are not caring for the person who is sick, limit your contact as much as possible. If you are taking care of the person:

- Make sure the person has plenty of tissues and a wastebasket for disposal
- Make sure soap and warm water or alcohol-based hand cleaners are available for hand washing.
- Encourage the person to remain in their room while sick.
- If possible, choose one person to be the primary caregiver. If tolerated, the sick individual should wear a surgical mask when the caregiver is within 3 feet. If the sick individual cannot tolerate a mask, the caregiver should consider wearing a mask when in close contact.
- If you handle the sick person's laundry, wash it with household laundry detergent and tumble dry on a hot setting. Avoid holding dirty laundry near your face and be sure to clean your hands after handling it.

How to find more information and resources

- Call 211/First Call for Help – a helpline with trained counselors to provide comprehensive information and referral support
- Websites:
 - www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
 - www.pandemic.wisconsin.gov – Wisconsin Department of Health Services – Pandemic Influenza Program
 - www.waukeshacounty.gov/pandemicflu - Waukesha County Public Health Division