

Stay healthy with facts about H1N1 flu



What is it?

The new H1N1 strain of influenza A was originally called “swine flu,” because it resembled a virus that is common in North American pigs. However, further study has shown that this is not the same virus.¹ H1N1 is spread from person to person like any other virus – through coughing, sneezing or contact with contaminated items. It causes the same symptoms as other flu viruses, too. Infected people may have a fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, chills, headache, nausea, vomiting and/or diarrhea, and fatigue. Only a trained medical practitioner will be able to tell whether you have H1N1 or another strain of the flu virus.²

What you need to know

You have probably heard about novel influenza A (H1N1), also referred to as “swine flu.” It has received a great deal of media coverage over the last year. While news reports of a previously unknown virus can be scary, novel influenza A usually causes only mild infection in otherwise healthy people, much like the other flu strains with which we’re all familiar.

Who is at risk?

Certain groups of people are at greater risk for complications when they get the flu, including children under 5, adults over 64, pregnant women and people with certain health conditions. Most of the people hospitalized after contracting H1N1 have one of these additional medical conditions:¹

- Pregnancy
- Diabetes
- Heart disease
- Asthma
- Kidney disease
- Suppressed immune system
- Neurocognitive and neuromuscular disorders

How to protect yourself

The same hygiene measures you'd use to avoid catching a cold will help prevent the H1N1 from spreading:

- Try to stay about a yard away from people who exhibit flu-like symptoms, to keep from inhaling any droplets of saliva expelled as they are speaking, coughing or sneezing.
- Avoid touching your face, and clean your hands regularly with soap and water or an alcohol-based sanitary gel.
- Steer clear of crowded areas, and open your windows to help improve the airflow through your home.
- Finally, boost your immune system by eating a healthy diet, exercising regularly, and getting enough sleep.

You do not need to wear a mask, unless you are caring for a sick person and are in close proximity to him or her.²

If you become sick with flu-like symptoms, stay home and rest. Avoid contact with others, and cover your nose and mouth when you cough or sneeze. Dispose of tissues carefully and clean your hands immediately. Seek medical attention if you experience shortness of breath or difficulty breathing; or if your fever lasts for more than three days. Parents should seek medical care for a sick child with fast or labored breathing, continuing fever or seizures. In most cases people recover with rest, plenty of fluids, and a pain reliever for their discomfort. Even if you feel better, stay home until your fever has been gone for at least 24 hours without medication, to keep from spreading the disease to others.²

Resources

Because the H1N1 situation is still developing and will continue to change rapidly, especially during flu season, look to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website at cdc.gov/h1n1flu for flu activity near you, recommendations, and press updates. Or, visit the World Health Organization at who.int and click on the "Pandemic (H1N1) 2009" link for global region-specific updates and information.

Should you be vaccinated?¹

A vaccine against H1N1 is expected to be available beginning in fall 2009. The CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) has recommended that the following groups receive the H1N1 vaccine:

- **Pregnant women** – because they are at higher risk of complications and can potentially provide protection to infants who cannot be vaccinated
- **Those in contact with or providing care for children younger than six months of age** – because younger infants are at higher risk of complications and cannot be vaccinated; vaccination of those in close contact with infants might protect infants by insulating them from the virus
- **Health care and emergency medical services personnel with direct patient contact** – because they present a potential source of infection for vulnerable patients; also, increased absenteeism in this population could reduce health care system capacity
- **Children from six months through four years of age**
- **Children 5 through 18 years of age who have health conditions associated with higher risk of medical complications from influenza**, such as asthma, diabetes, heart disease, kidney disease, neurocognitive or neuromuscular disorders, or a suppressed immune system

Visit anthem.com/ca for more ways to get healthy – and stay healthy.

Sources

¹ The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *H1N1 Flu*, (2009): cdc.gov

² World Health Organization, *Pandemic (H1N1) 2009*, (2009): who.int

