

# MEDfacts

An Educational Health Series From National Jewish Health®



## Novel H1N1 Flu

### What is influenza?

Influenza, also known as the “flu,” is an infection of the respiratory system that is caused by the influenza virus. Influenza is spread by coughing and sneezing. Influenza season peaks between late December and March, although this can vary each year. The flu is responsible for an average of 226,000 hospitalizations and 36,000 deaths every year in the United States.

### What is Novel H1N1 Flu?

The Novel H1N1 flu was first identified in the United States in April, 2009. H1N1 flu, first known as the swine flu, is an infection of the respiratory system that is caused by the H1N1 virus. The swine flu virus normally infects pigs, but rarely infects humans. A variation of the swine flu virus, the H1N1 virus does spread from human to human through coughing or sneezing by a person with H1N1 flu. How easily the H1N1 is spread from human to human is currently being investigated.

### How can you prevent the spread of H1N1 flu?

The primary means of preventing the spread of H1N1 flu include the following:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissues in the trash after you use them.
- 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.
- Stay home if you are sick for 7 days after your symptoms begin or until you have been symptom-free for 24 hours, whichever is longer. This is to keep from infecting others and spreading the virus further.

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### What are the signs and symptoms of H1N1 flu?

Symptoms of the H1N1 flu are somewhat similar to those of seasonal flu. Symptoms typically begin very quickly. Symptoms often include:

- Body aches,
- Feeling very tired,
- Fever and/or chills,
- Headache,
- Cough,
- Sore throat and
- Runny nose.

Diarrhea and vomiting have also been seen with the H1N1 flu. In addition, children may also have a high fever, diarrhea and seizures. The severity and course of the symptoms and populations at risk for severe symptoms are still being investigated.

### What are signs and symptoms that urgent medical care is needed in children?

In children, signs that urgent medical care is needed 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 and
- Flu-like symptoms that improve, then return with a fever a worsening cough.

### What are signs and symptoms that urgent medical care is needed in adults?

In adults, signs that urgent medical care is needed include:

- Trouble breathing or shortness of breath,
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen,
- Sudden dizziness,
- Confusion,
- Severe or persistent vomiting and
- Flu-like symptoms that improve, then return with a fever a worsening cough.

### What if someone still gets the H1N1 flu?

Stay home if you are sick for 7 days after your symptoms begin or until your fever has resolved for 24 hours, whichever is longer unless you need to seek medical care. This is to keep from infecting others and spreading the virus further. If someone has the severe signs and symptoms listed above seek emergency care right away.

Treatment with antiviral medicine is available when someone gets the H1N1 flu. These medicines help lessen the symptoms and the length of time a person is ill. Antiviral medicines must be started within the first two days after symptoms begin. These medicines include:

- Relenza® (zanamivir)
- Tamiflu® (oseltamivir)

### What about a vaccine for H1N1 flu?

A vaccine for H1N1 flu is being tested. In general, vaccines can prevent many of the illnesses and deaths associated with the flu. The H1N1 vaccine being tested contains either altered or weakened H1N1 viruses that cause your immune system to develop antibodies. In general, it takes two weeks to build an adequate level of antibodies to protect against the flu. When you are exposed to the flu, these antibodies then fight off the flu viruses.

### Who should get the H1N1 flu vaccine?

When the H1N1 vaccine is available it is strongly recommended for the following groups:

- Pregnant women,
- Household contacts and parents of children under 6 months,
- Healthcare and emergency care providers,
- All people from 6 months to 24 years of age,
- People age 25 – 64 years of age with health conditions placing them at higher risk of complications from influenza.

Once the demand is met with these groups, the H1N1 vaccine is recommended for other healthy adults.

Please discuss any questions you have about the H1N1 flu with your health care provider. The Center for Diseases Control and Prevention (CDC) has the latest information on H1N1 at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).

Note: This information is provided to you as an educational service of LUNG LINE®. It is not meant to be a substitute for consulting with your own physician.

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