

# What You Should Know About H1N1 Flu Prevention

You've probably heard about H1N1 flu (previously known as "swine flu") from TV news or newspaper reports recently. Since the Fall and Winter months are generally known as "flu season", it's important that you and your family have the most up-to-date information on flu prevention.

The following information highlights some frequently asked questions and answers about H1N1 flu prevention, its symptoms and treatment, and how it differs from the regular seasonal flu. If you have more questions or concerns about H1N1 flu or seasonal flu, talk to your doctor. Also, visit [www.flu.gov](http://www.flu.gov) for more information.

## What is H1N1 flu?

H1N1 flu is a new strain of influenza (flu) virus. It's a very contagious infection of the upper respiratory (breathing) tract that can easily spread from person to person.

H1N1 flu is different and separate from the seasonal flu. Both flu strains are of concern for certain people who are considered at-risk for problems that can be caused by the flu.

## Are there different vaccines for seasonal flu and H1N1 flu?

Yes, the vaccines are different and separate for seasonal flu and H1N1 flu.

- The seasonal flu vaccine is **not** expected to protect against H1N1 flu.
- If you require both vaccines, you can receive them at the same time.
- The vaccines are not yet available, but should be available in October 2009. Additional information is being released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as they continue to receive it.

## Who is at risk for H1N1 flu complications?

Anyone can get the flu. But some groups of people have a higher risk of developing complications from this new strain of H1N1 flu.

- Unlike seasonal flu, younger people may be more susceptible to complications of H1N1 flu.
- People with chronic illness, pregnant women, children and young adults aged 6 months to 24 years, and health care workers are also at increased risk.



- One thing that appears to be different from seasonal flu is that adults older than 64 years do not yet appear to be at increased risk of H1N1 flu-related complications so far.

### **How does H1N1 flu spread?**

H1N1 flu is spread from person to person. It's thought to occur in the same way that seasonal flu spreads. People can get H1N1 flu from:

- Someone who has the flu who coughs or sneezes.
- Touching a flu-contaminated object or surface like a door knob, telephone, toy, elevator button, etc.

### **How long is someone contagious?**

People who have H1N1 flu and/or seasonal flu are contagious and can spread flu to others from one day before symptoms occur, to 5 to 7 days after the symptoms start. This time period for spreading the flu can be longer in some people, especially children and people with weakened immune systems, and in people infected with the new H1N1 flu virus.

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

The symptoms of H1N1 flu can range from mild to severe, and are similar to the seasonal flu. They include:

- Fever
- Body aches
- Cough
- Headache
- Sore throat
- Chills
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Fatigue (feeling extremely tired; lack of energy)

Some people who have been infected with this virus also have reported symptoms of diarrhea and vomiting

## What should I do if I get sick?

If you have flu-like symptoms, the CDC suggests:

- You should stay home and avoid contact with other people. The CDC recommends that you stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone except to get medical care or for other necessities. Your fever should be gone for 24 hours without the use of a fever-reducing medicine before leaving home.
- Staying at home means that you should not leave your home except to seek medical care. This means avoiding normal activities, including work, school, travel, shopping, social events, and public gatherings.
- Stay away from others as much as possible to keep from making others sick.
- If you have severe illness or you are at high risk for flu complications, contact your health care provider or seek medical care. Your health care provider will determine whether flu testing or treatment is needed.

## What prevention steps can I take to avoid the flu?

The following recommendations can help stop the flu from spreading. Take these everyday steps to help protect your health:

### General illness prevention tips

- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- Get a seasonal flu shot and an H1N1 shot if you require them. Vaccines should be available in October 2009. You can receive both shots at the same time.

If you are sick with a flu-like illness:

- The CDC recommends that you stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone *without* the use of a fever-reducing medicine. Do not leave home except to get medical care or for other necessities.
- Keep away from others as much as possible to avoid making others sick.

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue 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 every time that you cough or sneeze.
- Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective in killing flu germs.

### Hand washing

Washing your hands often will help protect you from germs. Wash with soap and water or clean with an alcohol-based hand cleaner.

- The CDC recommends that when you wash your hands with soap and warm water that you wash for 15 to 20 seconds.
- When soap and water are not available, alcohol-based disposable hand wipes or gel sanitizers may be used. You can find them in most supermarkets and drug stores.
- If using gel, rub your hands until the gel is dry. The gel doesn't need water to work; the alcohol in it kills the germs on your hands.

### Be Prepared

- Follow public health advice regarding school closures, avoiding crowds, and other social distancing measures.
- Be prepared in case you get sick and need to stay home for a week or so. A supply of over-the-counter medicines, alcohol-based hand rubs, tissues, and other related items will help decrease the need to make trips out in public while you are sick and contagious

If you have more questions or concerns about H1N1 flu or seasonal flu, talk to your doctor. Also, visit [www.flu.gov](http://www.flu.gov) for more information.

Source:  
Centers of Disease Control and Prevention – [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov), Last accessed August 18, 2009.

This information is intended for educational purposes only, and should not be interpreted as medical advice. Please consult your physician for advice about changes that may affect your health.