

H1N1 Flu and You

Q: What is novel H1N1 Flu (formerly known as Swine Flu) and how is it transmitted?

A: Novel H1N1 flu is a new strain of the flu virus. It is a respiratory illness thought to spread in the same way that seasonal flu is spread, which is through people infected with the virus who are coughing or sneezing. It can be spread by touching something with flu viruses on it, such as a tissue or a door knob, and then touching your mouth, eyes or nose.

Q: What is the difference between seasonal flu and this new strain of H1N1?

A: Seasonal flu viruses have been circulating in human populations for several seasons, allowing people to build up immunities to them. Most people (especially those ages 2-24) do not have immunity to the new strain of H1N1 flu. A vaccine is available to prevent seasonal flu. A vaccine for novel H1N1 flu is being developed and is expected to be available early to mid-October.

Q: What are the symptoms of H1N1 flu?

A: Most, but not all, people with confirmed novel H1N1 flu have had a sudden onset of fever (half having a temperature greater than 102.5°F) and cough. Most have had a sore throat. Other symptoms may include runny nose, body aches, headache, chills, fatigue, diarrhea, and vomiting. People may have only one or two symptoms, or they may have many. Almost everyone with H1N1 flu has been taken care of at home and recovered in a few days. Illnesses with a lot of nasal congestion and mild fever are probably not H1N1 flu.

Q: What is the infection period?

A: People can infect others with the H1N1 flu even before they show symptoms. They remain contagious for seven or more days after they become sick.

Q: How can I avoid getting infected?

A: You can protect yourself from the H1N1 flu by washing your hands frequently with soap and warm water. You also can use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. You should avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Stay away from people who are sick (especially if they have fever, cough and a sore throat). Get plenty of sleep, exercise regularly, manage stress, drink plenty of fluids, and eat nutritious foods.

Q: What do I do if I have these symptoms?

A: In most cases people with H1N1 flu will get better without medical attention. Dial the state's **2-1-1 health information helpline** to receive over-the-phone medical guidance from medical professionals about how to manage flu symptoms and advice on when to seek medical care. Get plenty of rest, drink fluids, take fever reducing medications, if needed. **WARNING: DO NOT** give aspirin or aspirin-containing medications to children and youth ages 18 years or younger. If you have symptoms stay home from work, school, errands, and limit close contact with others to keep from infecting them. Wait to be around people until your fever has been gone for 24 hours without taking fever-reducing medications. If you work in a hospital or other health care setting around people at high risk of complications from flu, stay home for 7 days after symptoms begin or until your symptoms are gone, whichever is longer. Most cases have been mild, and most hospitalizations and deaths have been persons that also had underlying conditions such as asthma, diabetes, obesity, heart disease, or a weakened immune system. **Treatment with influenza antiviral drugs is generally not needed for people who are not at higher risk due to underlying conditions, or do not have severe influenza, such as those requiring hospitalization.** However, if you are experiencing emergency warning signs (such as difficulty breathing or shortness of breath) or signs of lower respiratory tract illness or worsening illness, seek medical care promptly.

Q: Should I be tested for H1N1 flu?

A: Most people do not need to be tested. It will not make a difference in how your illness is treated. Your physician will make the decision.

Q: If I had a flu vaccine this season, am I protected against H1N1?

A: The seasonal flu vaccine does not provide protection against H1N1 flu, but is important in protecting you from other flu viruses that can make you as sick or sicker. This makes ordinary precautions, such as covering coughs and sneezes and washing hands, even more important. It is important to be up to date on your other vaccinations, such as tetanus/pertussis/diphtheria and Pneumococcal (Tdap) vaccines, to avoid getting infected with more than one germ at a time.

Q: Is there a vaccine for H1N1 flu and should I get it?

A: There is a vaccine under development for H1N1 flu that is expected to be available in early to mid-October. The CDC developed the priority vaccine recommendations for seasonal flu and H1N1 flu vaccinations. Ask your physician if you should be vaccinated for H1N1. See chart on the right for CDC's recommendations.

Q: How do I get more information/updates?

A: Continue to monitor these Web sites: Dept. of State Health Services (DSHS) (www.texasflu.org), CDC (www.cdc.gov), City of Houston Dept. of Health & Human Services (www.houstontx.gov/health/swineflu.html), and Harris County Public Health and Environmental Services (www.hcphe.org/flu/pandemicplan.htm). Or call DSHS toll-free at 1-888-963-7111.

CDC's Priority Vaccine Recommendations: (Marked by X)

H1N1 Vaccine	Seasonal Flu	
X	X	Pregnant women
X	X	People who live with or care for babies under 6 months of age
X	X	Children and young people ages 6 months to 18 years
X		All young adults ages 19 to 24
	X	People 50 years of age and older
X	X	People ages 24 to 64 with certain chronic medical conditions
X	X	Health care and emergency medical services workers
	X	People who live in nursing homes and other long-term care facilities
	X	People who live with or care for those at high risk for complications from flu (except infants)