



Influenza A (H1N1) Fact Sheet

What is Influenza A (H1N1)?

Influenza A (H1N1) (referred to as “swine flu” early on) is a new influenza virus. This virus is spreading from person- to-person, probably in much the same way that regular seasonal influenza viruses spread.

Is this new H1N1 virus contagious?

Yes, however, at this time, it is not known how easily the virus spreads between people.

What are the signs and symptoms of this virus?

The symptoms of this new H1N1 flu virus in people are similar to the symptoms of seasonal flu and include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. A significant number of people who have been infected with this virus have reported diarrhea and vomiting.

How severe is illness associated with this new H1N1 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 infection with this virus have occurred. As in seasonal flu, there are certain

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people that are at higher risk of serious flu-related complications such as children younger than five years old, pregnant women, and people of any age with chronic medical conditions.

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

How does this new H1N1 virus spread?

Flu viruses are spread mainly from person to person through coughing or sneezing by people with influenza. Sometimes people may become infected by touching a hard surface with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose.

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

People may be contagious from one day before they develop symptoms to up to 7 days after they get sick. Children, especially younger children, might potentially be contagious for longer periods.

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What can I do to protect myself from getting sick?

There is no vaccine available right now to protect against this new H1N1 virus. There are everyday actions that can help prevent the spread of germs that cause respiratory illnesses like influenza.

Take these everyday steps to protect your health:

- 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 you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- What should I do if I get sick?
- Stay home if you are sick until at least 24 hours after your fever is gone (without using fever-reducing medicines). This is to keep from infecting others and spreading the virus further.
- 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; keep a supply of over-the-counter medicines, alcohol-based hand rubs, tissues and other related items on hand.

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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.

In children, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention 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
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough

In adults, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough

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How long can influenza virus stay on objects (such as books and doorknobs)?

Studies have shown that influenza virus can survive on environmental surfaces and can infect a person for up to 2-8 hours after being deposited on the surface.

What household cleaning should be done to prevent the spread of influenza virus?

It is important to keep surfaces (especially bedside tables, surfaces in the bathroom, kitchen counters and toys for children) clean by wiping them down with a household disinfectant according to directions on the product label.

How should linens, eating utensils and dishes of persons infected with influenza virus be handled?

Linens, eating utensils, and dishes belonging to those who are sick do not need to be cleaned separately, but importantly these items should not be shared without washing thoroughly first.

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Linens (such as bed sheets and towels) should be washed by using household laundry soap and tumbled dry on a hot setting. Individuals should avoid “hugging” laundry prior to washing it to prevent contaminating themselves. Individuals should wash their hands with soap and water or alcohol-based hand rub immediately after handling dirty laundry.

*For further information, contact the
Oklahoma City-County Health Department
(405) 425-4437*

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