
Novel H1N1 Influenza (Swine Flu) - QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

What is novel H1N1 flu?

H1N1 Influenza (swine flu) is a respiratory disease of pigs caused by type A influenza viruses. Outbreaks of swine flu happen regularly in pigs. People do not normally get swine flu, but human infections can and do happen. Most commonly, human cases of swine flu happen in people who are around pigs but it's possible for swine flu viruses to spread from person to person as well.

Are there human infections with novel H1N1 flu in the U.S.?

In late March and early April 2009, cases of human infection with novel influenza A (H1N1) viruses were first reported in Southern California and near San Antonio, Texas. Since that time, cases have also been reported in 36 states. Cases have been reported internationally as well. CDC and local and state health agencies are working together to investigate this situation.

Is this novel H1N1 flu virus contagious?

CDC has determined that this virus is contagious and is spreading from human to human. However, at this time, it is not known how easily the virus spreads between people.

What are the signs and symptoms of novel H1N1 flu in people?

The symptoms of novel H1N1 flu in people are similar to the symptoms of regular human flu and include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people have reported diarrhea and vomiting associated with novel H1N1 flu. In the past, severe illness (pneumonia and respiratory failure) and deaths have been reported with novel H1N1 flu infection in people. Like seasonal flu, novel H1N1 flu may cause a worsening of underlying chronic medical conditions.

How serious is novel H1N1 flu infection?

Like seasonal flu, novel H1N1 flu in humans can vary in severity from mild to severe. Between 2005 and January 2009, 12 human cases of novel H1N1 flu were detected in the U.S. with no deaths occurring. However, H1N1 flu infection can be serious. In September 1988, a previously healthy 32-year-old pregnant woman in Wisconsin was hospitalized for pneumonia after being infected with H1N1 flu and died 8 days later. A swine flu outbreak in Fort Dix, New Jersey occurred in 1976 that caused more than 200 cases with serious illness in several people and one death.

How do you catch novel H1N1 flu?

Spread of novel H1N1 flu can occur in two ways:

- Through contact with infected pigs or environments contaminated with novel H1N1 flu viruses.
- Through contact with a person with novel H1N1 flu. Human-to-human spread of novel H1N1 flu has been documented also and is thought to occur in the same way as seasonal flu. Influenza is thought to spread mainly person-to-person through coughing or sneezing of infected people.

Are there medicines to treat novel H1N1 flu?

Yes. If your doctor decides you need treatment, the CDC recommends the use of oseltamivir or zanamivir. These medications are effective for prevention of infection with these novel influenza viruses. Antiviral drugs are prescription medicines (pills, liquid or an inhaler) that fight against the flu by keeping flu viruses from reproducing in your body. If you get sick, antiviral drugs can make your illness milder and make you feel better faster. They may also prevent serious flu complications. For treatment, antiviral drugs work best if started soon after getting sick (within 2 days of symptoms).

How long can an infected person spread novel H1N1 flu to others?

People with novel H1N1 influenza virus infection should be considered potentially contagious as long as they are symptomatic and possibly for up to 7 days following illness onset. Children, especially younger children, might potentially be contagious for longer periods.

What can I do to protect myself from getting sick?

There is no vaccine available right now to protect against novel H1N1 flu. 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 or the crook of your elbow 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. Germs spread that way.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.

What should I do if I get sick?

If you become ill with influenza-like symptoms, including fever, body aches, runny nose, sore throat, nausea, or vomiting or diarrhea, you may want to contact your health care provider, particularly if you are worried about your symptoms. Your health care provider will determine whether influenza testing or treatment is needed. Healthcare providers will ask you to wear a mask while in the healthcare facility to prevent spread of germs to others.

If you are sick, you should stay home and avoid contact with other people as much as possible to keep from spreading your illness to others.

If you become ill and experience any of the following warning signs, seek emergency medical care.

In children emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids
- 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
- Fever with a rash

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

Can I get novel H1N1 influenza from eating or preparing pork?

No. Novel H1N1 influenza viruses are not spread by food. You cannot get novel H1N1 influenza from eating pork or pork products. Eat properly handled and cooked pork products.

An electronic version of this document can be found at <http://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/heic/h1n1>