What is H1N1 (swine flu)?

H1N1 (swine flu) is a type of influenza (flu) virus that causes respiratory disease that can spread between people. Most people infected with this virus in the United States have had mild disease, but some have had more severe illness, and there has been at least one death. Young children, pregnant women, and people with chronic diseases like asthma, diabetes, or heart disease may be at higher risk for complications from this infection. More information about who may be at higher risk will be available when more is known about the disease.

There are steps you can take to protect your family and to know when to seek medical care.

What are the signs and symptoms of this virus in people?

The symptoms of this new influenza A H1N1 virus in people are similar to the symptoms of regular human flu and include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. A significant number of people who have been infected with this virus also have reported diarrhea and vomiting. Also, like seasonal flu, severe illnesses and death has occurred as a result of illness associated with this virus.

How does this new H1N1 virus spread?

Spread of this H1N1 virus is thought to be happening in the same way that seasonal flu spreads. Flu viruses are spread mainly from person to person through coughing or sneezing by people with influenza. Sometimes people may become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose.

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. Germs spread this way.
• In communities where H1N1 (swine flu) has occurred, stay away from shopping malls, movie theaters, or other places where there are large groups of people.
• 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.
• 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 might be useful and help avoid the need to make trips out in public while you are sick and contagious.

What should I do if myself or my children get sick?

If you live in areas where cases have been identified and become ill with influenza-like symptoms, including fever, body aches, runny nose, sore throat, nausea, or vomiting or diarrhea, you may want to contact their health care provider, particularly if you are worried about your symptoms. Your health care provider will determine whether influenza testing or treatment is needed. If you become ill and experience any of the following warning signs, seek emergency medical care. 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

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
• 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

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Disclaimer: The text presented on these pages is for your information only. It is not a substitute for professional medical advice. It may not represent your true individual medical situation. Do not use this information to diagnose or treat a health problem or disease without consulting a qualified health care provider. Please consult your health care provider if you have any questions or concerns.
Young children may not have typical symptoms, but may have difficulty breathing and low activity. Little is known about how H1N1 (swine flu) may affect children. However, we think the infection may be similar to other flu infections. Typically, flu infections cause mild disease in children, but children under 5 years old are more likely to have serious illness than older children. Although rare, severe respiratory illness (pneumonia) and deaths have been reported with flu infections in children. Flu infections tend to be more severe in children with chronic medical conditions.

**Are there medicines to treat infection with this new virus?**

Yes. CDC recommends the use of oseltamivir or zanamivir for the treatment and/or prevention of infection with these new influenza A (H1N1) 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. During the current outbreak, the priority use for influenza antiviral drugs during is to treat severe influenza illness.

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

At the current time, CDC believes that this virus has the same properties in terms of spread as seasonal flu viruses. With seasonal flu, studies have shown that 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. CDC is studying the virus and its capabilities to try to learn more and will provide more information as it becomes available.

**What surfaces are most likely to be sources of contamination?**

Germs can be spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose, or mouth. Droplets from a cough or sneeze of an infected person can move through the air. Germs can be spread when a person touches respiratory droplets from another person on a surface like a desk, for example, and then touches their own eyes, mouth or nose before washing their hands. 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.

**Do pigs carry this virus and can I catch this virus from a pig?**

At this time, there is no evidence that swine in the United States are infected with this new virus. However, there are flu viruses that commonly cause outbreaks of illness in pigs. Most of the time, these viruses do not infect people, but influenza viruses can spread back and forth between pigs and people.

**Can I get infected with this new H1N1 virus from eating or preparing pork?**

No. H1N1 viruses are not spread by food. You cannot get this new H1N1 virus from eating pork or pork products. Eating properly handled and cooked pork products is safe.

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

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.

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. Eating utensils should be washed either in a dishwasher or by hand with water and soap.

*Note: Information made available by the Centers of Disease Control 2009. Much of the information in this document is based on studies and past experience with seasonal (human) influenza. CDC believes the information applies to the new H1N1 (swine) viruses as well, but studies on this virus are ongoing to learn more about its characteristics. For more information call 1-800-CDC INFO, or go to http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu.*