

H1N1 Influenza (Swine Flu)

H1N1 influenza, also called swine flu, is an illness that mainly affects the lungs. This illness is caused by the influenza A (H1N1) virus, a germ that usually infects pigs (swine). The virus has now spread to humans and is easily passed from one person to another. This sheet answers some questions you may have about H1N1 flu.

How Does H1N1 Flu Spread?

The H1N1 flu virus can spread from infected pigs to humans that come in contact with them. The virus can then be passed among people the same way the regular flu spreads—through the air in droplets when someone with the virus coughs, sneezes, laughs, or talks. You can also become infected when you touch a surface on which the droplets have landed and then transfer the virus to your eyes, nose, or mouth. Touching used tissues, or sharing utensils, drinking glasses, or a toothbrush with an infected person can expose you to the H1N1 flu virus, too.

Note: You cannot become infected with H1N1 flu from eating pork or pork products that have been properly handled and cooked.

What Are the Symptoms of H1N1 Flu?

H1N1 flu symptoms are about the same as regular flu symptoms. These include:

- Fever, usually higher than 100°F, and chills
- Sore throat
- Headache
- Body and muscle aches
- Dry cough
- Runny nose
- Tiredness and weakness
- Diarrhea and vomiting

Call your healthcare provider for advice if any of the above symptoms become severe. If H1N1 flu is in your area, your healthcare provider may have you tested.

How Is H1N1 Flu Treated?

If H1N1 flu is in your area and your symptoms are severe, your healthcare provider may prescribe medications called antivirals. These must be taken within 2 days of when your symptoms started. Antivirals work by stopping the H1N1 flu virus from reproducing in your body. This gives your body's immune system a chance to fight the virus. After taking the medication, your symptoms may be milder and you may recover quicker than without the medication. The medication may also prevent serious complications such as pneumonia. Antivirals come in the form of pills, liquid, or inhaler.

If your symptoms are mild, your healthcare provider will likely tell you to follow the self-care measures listed below.

Easing Flu Symptoms

- Drink lots of fluids such as water, juice, and warm soup to prevent dehydration. A good rule is to drink enough so that you urinate your normal amount.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Ask your healthcare provider about acetaminophen or other medications for fever and pain. Take any medication only as directed. Do not give aspirin to children under age 18. It can cause a rare but serious illness called Reye syndrome.
- Call your doctor if your fever rises over 100°F or you become dizzy, lightheaded, or short of breath.

Taking Steps to Protect Others

- Wash your hands often, especially after coughing or sneezing. Or, clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand gel containing at least 60 percent alcohol.
- Cough or sneeze into a tissue. Then throw the tissue away and wash your hands. If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into the crook of your elbow.
- Stay home at least 7 days after you first feel sick or until your fever and cough are gone.
- Don't share food, utensils, drinking glasses, or a toothbrush with others.
- Ask your doctor whether others in your household should receive antiviral medication to help them avoid infection.

How Can H1N1 Flu Be Prevented?

At this time, there is no vaccine to prevent H1N1 flu. But there are things you can do to avoid becoming infected with H1N1 flu.

- Wash your hands often. Frequent handwashing is a proven way to prevent infection.
- Carry an alcohol-based hand gel containing at least 60 percent alcohol. Use it when you don't have access to soap and water. Alcohol gels kill most germs and are safe for children.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- At home and work, clean phones, computer keyboards, and toys often with disinfectant wipes.
- If possible, avoid close contact with others, especially if H1N1 flu cases have been identified in the area where you live.
- Wearing a surgical facemask can help protect against getting H1N1 flu. The mask prevents the spread of infected droplets when infected people cough, sneeze, laugh, or talk.

You should still get the regular flu vaccine every year. Your healthcare provider can answer any questions you have about this.

Handwashing Tips

Handwashing is one of the best ways to prevent the spread of H1N1 flu and other common infections. Follow these steps:

- Use warm water and plenty of soap. Work up a good lather.
- Clean the whole hand, under your nails, between your fingers, and up the wrists.
- Wash for at least 15 seconds. Don't just wipe—scrub well.
- Rinse, letting the water run down your fingers, not up your wrists.
- Dry your hands well. Use a paper towel to turn off the faucet and open the door.

Using Alcohol-Based Hand Gels

Alcohol-based hand gels are also a good choice for cleaning your hands. Use them when you don't have access to soap and water, or your hands aren't visibly dirty. Follow these steps:

- Squeeze about a tablespoon of gel into the palm of one hand.
- Rub your hands together briskly, cleaning the backs of your hands, the palms, between your fingers, and up the wrists.
- Rub until the gel is gone and your hands are completely dry.

To Learn More about H1N1 Flu

Visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website:

http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/swineflu_you.htm

This information is not intended as a substitute for professional medical care. Always follow your healthcare professional's instructions.