

Pandemic (H1N1) Flu Answers to Frequently Asked Questions

What is H1N1 flu?

The pandemic H1N1 influenza (flu) is a variation of the Influenza A H1N1 virus. [It has also been referred to as H1N1 flu; the new type of H1N1 flu virus, novel H1N1, pandemic flu (H1N1), and swine flu. For the purposes of this document it will be referenced as H1N1 flu.]



This new virus was first detected in people in the United States in April 2009. On June 11, 2009, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared that the H1N1 flu virus had spread to enough countries to be considered a global pandemic. (A pandemic is a worldwide outbreak of a new flu virus which people have little or no immunity and that spreads easily from person to person.) This pandemic stage does not mean that the disease is deadlier or more severe, just that it has spread to more countries.

In general, illness in the U.S. has ranged from mild to severe, and most people that test positive for the virus recover without requiring medical treatment. However, influenza is unpredictable and the virus may change—either becoming more or less serious. Scientists are watching closely to see how severe the new H1N1 flu virus will be—but health experts warn that it is hard to predict how flu viruses may change.

This virus was originally referred to as “swine flu” because laboratory testing showed that many of the genes in this new virus were very similar to influenza viruses that normally occur in pigs (swine) in North America. But further study has shown that this new virus is very different from what normally circulates in North American pigs. It has two genes from flu viruses that normally circulate in pigs in Europe and Asia and bird (avian) genes and human genes. Scientists call this a “quadruple reassortant” virus.

What are the symptoms of H1N1 flu?

The symptoms of H1N1 flu in people are similar to the symptoms of regular seasonal influenza and include fever, body aches, lack of energy, lack of appetite, headache, fatigue, and coughing. Some people with pandemic flu also have reported runny or stuffy nose, sore throat, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea. In general, illness in the U.S. has ranged from mild to severe, and most people that test positive for the virus recover without requiring medical treatment.

How do I know if I have H1N1 flu?

Since the symptoms for H1N1 flu are similar to symptoms for seasonal flu, the only way to know for sure that you have H1N1 flu is for your doctor to collect a nasal/pharyngeal specimen and send the sample to a laboratory for confirmation.

How severe is H1N1 flu?

So far this H1N1 flu virus has been similar to the seasonal flu we see each year. During a regular flu season, influenza can cause mild to severe illness and sometimes leads to death. Each year, in the United States, on average 36,000 people die from flu-related complications and more than 200,000 people are hospitalized. Some people are more likely to become very ill if they catch this H1N1 flu virus. These include children under age 5, pregnant women, children who take medicines that contain aspirin, and people of any age with chronic medical conditions, such as asthma, heart or lung problems, diabetes, immune system problems, or other serious health problems. If your child has a serious medical condition, talk to your doctor or clinic about how to keep your child healthy in flu season.

However, influenza is unpredictable and the virus may change. Health officials are encouraging everyone to get their seasonal flu vaccine as soon as it is available. With the possibility that H1N1 may be in the mix, influenza activity may pick up sooner than usual this fall.

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What are the warning signs of serious influenza illness?

If you or your family become ill and exhibit the following warning signs, you should call your health care provider immediately.

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

- Fever above 100° F
- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish or gray skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Not urinating or no tears when crying
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Being very sleepy or confused, not waking up or interacting
- Being so irritable that nothing makes the child feel better
- Pain or pressure in the chest or stomach area
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and more severe cough

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

- Fever above 100° F
- 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 more severe cough

How do I know if my family members have the flu?

Symptoms of both the H1N1 flu and regular, seasonal flu are similar. They include sudden onset of fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills, and extreme tiredness. Some people who have been infected with the H1N1 flu virus also have reported upset stomach, nausea, diarrhea, and vomiting.

How is H1N1 flu spread?

The new H1N1 flu virus apparently spreads just like regular flu. People spread flu viruses easily from person to person through coughing or sneezing. The H1N1 flu virus can become airborne if you cough or sneeze without covering your nose and mouth, sending germs into the air. You could pick up germs directly from an infected person, or by touching an object contaminated with germs from an infected person, and then touching your eyes, mouth, or nose, putting germs into your body. That's why you should make washing your hands a habit, even when you're not ill. Infected people can start spreading flu germs up to a day before symptoms start, and for up to seven days after getting sick, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

How long can a sick person spread the flu to others?

People infected with seasonal and H1N1 flu shed virus and may be able to infect others from one day before getting sick to five to seven days after. This can be longer in some people, especially for anyone with weakened immune systems and in people infected with H1N1 flu.



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How do I prevent my family and me from catching H1N1 flu?

Public Health officials recommend that you use the same precautions to prevent H1N1 flu as you would for seasonal flu. There are everyday actions people can take to stay healthy. It is important to teach your children how to reduce the risk of getting the flu and how to protect others from becoming infected.



Wash your hands frequently or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer and teach your family to do the same. When washing with soap and water, wash for at least 20 seconds, which is about as long as it takes to sing the “Happy Birthday” song twice. When using hand sanitizers make sure they contain at least 60 percent alcohol. Have everyone in your household wash their hands often.



Stay about six feet away from someone who has a respiratory infection when possible. Individuals can be infectious for seven days from onset of symptoms, but are most infectious until 24 hours after fever has passed.



Avoid touching your nose, mouth, and eyes. Keep your hands away from your face because that’s how viruses get into your body.



Cover your coughs and sneezes with tissues or by coughing into the inside of your elbow or sleeve. After blowing your nose or coughing into a tissue, properly dispose of the tissue. Then, make sure to wash your hands.



and

Practice a healthy lifestyle — get plenty of sleep, exercise regularly, and eat a healthy diet.



Don’t share food, utensils or beverages with others.



If I think I am sick, how do I keep my family members and others from getting sick?

Public Health officials recommend that you use the same precautions to prevent others from getting H1N1 flu as you would for seasonal flu.

- Wash your hands frequently or use an alcohol hand sanitizer and teach your family to do the same.
- Cover your cough, either with a tissue or cough into your sleeve;
- Sneeze into a tissue or your sleeve.
- Don’t share food, unwashed utensils, or beverages with others.
- Keep bedside tables, kitchen counters, toys, and bathroom surfaces clean by wiping them down with a household disinfectant according to directions on the product label.
- Anyone who is included in a high risk group for complications from influenza should avoid close contact (within six feet) with household members who are sick. Infants should not be cared for by sick family members— and
- Stay home from work or school if you are sick.



Pandemic (H1N1) Flu Answers to Frequently Asked Questions

What should I do if I am sick?

Most people with influenza recover with plenty of rest, drinking clear fluids, and taking over the counter pain relievers to reduce fever and body aches.

Check with your health care provider about any special care that you might need if you are pregnant or have a health condition such as diabetes, heart disease, asthma, or emphysema. Treatment may vary.

Be watchful of warning signs that might indicate that you need to seek medical attention—especially if your symptoms are severe or quickly worsen.

The CDC recommends that you stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them. Anyone with flu-like symptoms should stay home until your symptoms have disappeared. This includes having no fever, or signs of a fever, for at least 24 hours without using medication to reduce the fever. This recommendation applies to camps, schools, businesses, mass gatherings, and other community settings where the majority of people are not at increased risk for influenza complications. This guidance **does not** apply to health care settings where the exclusion period for employees should be continued for 7 days from symptom onset or until the resolution of symptoms, whichever is longer.

What should I do if my child is sick?

Most people with influenza recover with plenty of rest, drinking clear fluids, and taking over the counter pain relievers to reduce fever and body aches.

Be watchful of warning signs that might indicate that you need to seek medical attention—especially if your symptoms are severe or quickly worsen. Those children with chronic medical

conditions may be at higher risk of serious complications.

If your child has fever, sore throat, and/or cough, he or she could have the flu.

- Parents should use the same judgment about whether to take an ill child to the doctor as they would during normal flu season. If you would not usually see a health care provider for the symptoms your child is exhibiting, you shouldn't need to see a health care provider.
- It is important that your child stay home from school or other places where your child might spread the flu to other people. This includes group childcare, after-school programs or clubs, church programs, the mall, sporting events, or other public places.
- It is advisable for working parents to develop a contingency plan for someone to care for your child in the event your child becomes sick and needs to stay at home or in the event the school is forced to close.
- When you call your child's school to notify them that your child is sick, please tell the school nurse if your child has flu-like symptoms such as fever, a sore throat, or cough.
- Always follow doctor's instructions and take medicine as prescribed.
- Anyone with flu-like symptoms should stay home until the symptoms have gone away. This includes having no fever, or signs of a fever, for at least 24 hours without using medicine to reduce the fever.



Pandemic (H1N1) Flu Answers to Frequently Asked Questions

When should I go to the doctor?

Call a health care provider if you cannot take care of yourself or a loved one at home.

If you or your family become ill and exhibit the following warning signs, you should call your health care provider immediately.

(NOTE: See Warning signs of serious influenza illness above.)

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

Studies show that influenza virus can survive on hard surfaces, such as counters, doorknobs, and books, etc. and can infect a person for two to eight hours after being deposited on the surface.

What household/work 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.

Frequently clean all commonly touched surfaces in the workplace, such as workstations, countertops, telephones, keyboards, and doorknobs. Use the cleaning agents that are usually used in these areas and follow the directions on the label.

What is the best technique for washing my hands to avoid getting the flu?

Washing your hands often will help protect you from germs. Wash with soap and water or clean with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. CDC recommends when you wash your hands — with soap and water — that you wash for 20 seconds. When soap and water are not available, alcohol-based disposable hand wipes or gel sanitizers may be used. If using gel, rub your hands until the

gel is dry. The gel doesn't need water to work; the alcohol in it kills the germs on your hands.

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.

I have received the seasonal flu shot this year, could I still get the pandemic flu?

Yes. Consider seasonal flu and H1N1 flu as two different disease entities. They require two different vaccines. Protection from one, does not protect from the other. Likewise, unprotected, an individual may get sick from either or both viruses during the flu season. The CDC strongly advises you to take the seasonal flu vaccination as well as the H1N1 flu vaccine, especially if you are in the priority groups.

I had the flu earlier this year can I still catch the pandemic flu?

Yes.

Visit www.flu.gov, or call 1-800-CDC-INFO for the most current information about flu. For information about flu in our community, visit www.swdh.org.



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If I have a family member at home who is sick with pandemic (H1N1) flu, should I go to work?

Employees who are well but who have an ill family member at home with H1N1 flu can go to work as usual. These employees should monitor their health every day, and take everyday precautions including washing their hands often with soap and water, especially after they cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers are also effective.

Because flu is contagious 24 hours before symptoms, an employee who has had an exposure to influenza by way of a household or family member, should take extra precautions in preventing spread to others by engaging in social distancing. As much as possible, stay three to six feet from co-workers, avoid attendance at gatherings, wash hands frequently, and avoid shaking hands. Incubation time for influenza is 2-4 days. This enhanced level of social distancing should be used for 5-7 days after last exposure to a known case of influenza.

If they become ill, they should notify their supervisor and stay home. Employees who have an underlying medical condition or who are pregnant should call their health care provider for advice, because they might need to receive influenza antiviral drugs to prevent illness. For more information please see [General Business and Workplace Guidance for the Prevention of Novel Influenza A \(H1N1\) Flu in Workers](http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/guidance/workplace.htm), <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/guidance/workplace.htm>.

If I get H1N1 flu, will I die?

Every year the seasonal flu kills people, usually those who are most vulnerable such as young children, the elderly, or those with medical conditions. According to the World Health Organization and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the virus called the H1N1 flu currently has a very low death rate of less than 0.1

percent in the United States. In other countries, this rate may be higher due to many factors (including access to medical care, how early a person is identified with illness, etc).

What medicines can/should I take if I think I have pandemic (H1N1) flu?

The H1N1 flu virus is sensitive to the antiviral drugs Tamiflu and Relenza. These medicines can be prescribed by your medical provider. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends those drugs to prevent or treat pandemic (H1N1) flu; the drugs are most effective when taken within 48 hours of the start of flu symptoms. (Antiviral drugs are prescription medicines (pills, liquid or an inhaled powder) 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. But not everyone needs those drugs; many of the first people in the U.S. with lab-confirmed H1N1 flu recovered without treatment. The priority use for influenza antiviral drugs is to treat severe influenza illness. Treatment is particularly recommended for those who are at high risk for complications from the flu including children younger than 5 years of age, the elderly, and those with chronic medical conditions. You can also use over the counter influenza medications to treat your symptoms. Remember to drink plenty of fluids, get lots of rest, and always take medicine as prescribed.

Should I call my doctor or go to the hospital?

If you have flu symptoms, stay home, and practice good hygiene to help prevent your flu from spreading. If you have severe flu symptoms see a doctor. Keep in mind that your doctor will not be able to determine whether you have H1N1 flu, but can take a sample from you and send it to a lab for testing to see if it's pandemic flu.



Pandemic (H1N1) Flu Answers to Frequently Asked Questions

If my doctor says I have H1N1 flu, is he/she going to isolate me?

No. But, if you are sick with the flu, whether it is the seasonal flu or is suspected as the H1N1 flu, you should stay at home to prevent exposing others to your illness. Public Health officials and your doctor may ask you to stay at home until your symptoms have disappeared, for at least 24 hours. This recommendation applies to camps, schools, businesses, mass gatherings, and other community settings where the majority of people are not at increased risk for influenza complications. This guidance **does not** apply to health care settings where the exclusion period for employees should be continued for 7 days from symptom onset or until the resolution of symptoms, whichever is longer. Your family members who have been exposed to you should avoid contact with others. If confirmed, it is required for your medical provider to report the positive case to Idaho Department of Health and Welfare or Southwest District Health.

What if I or a co-worker gets sick at work?

CDC recommends that workers who appear to have an influenza-like illness upon arrival or become ill during the day be promptly separated from other workers and be advised to go home until at least 24 hours after they are free of fever (100° F [37.8° C] or greater), or signs of a fever, without the use of fever-reducing medications.

Employees exposed to a sick co-worker should monitor themselves for symptoms of influenza-like illness and stay home if they are sick.

Should I wear a mask?

Right now, public health officials are not recommending that anyone wear a mask.



STOP GERMS -- STAY HEALTHY!

Will vaccination against the new H1N1 influenza be mandatory?

No, only highly recommended. Taking the H1N1 vaccine is a personal choice. Consult with your physician and consider the recommendations from The CDC and ACIP (The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices) if you are unsure.

Where can I get tested for H1N1 flu?

Idaho's public health districts will not be testing for H1N1, so you need to consult with your health care provider to see if they are testing.

When should my child return to school?

The CDC recommends that people with influenza-like illness remain at home until at least 24 hours after they are free of fever (100° F [37.8° C]), without the use of fever-reducing medications.

Will my child's school be closed if there is a case of swine flu?

School closure has sometimes been used to slow the spread of flu in a community. However, federal officials are now recommending that schools remain open and focus on ways to keep schools and students healthy so that educational activities are not disrupted. A key strategy is to keep sick students and staff out of school. Realistically, some schools will be justified in closing if they have a high rate of infection, large numbers of medically frail students, large numbers of pregnant students, the virus begins to cause more severe illness, or the local outbreak is especially intense. If schools are closed due to flu, children should stay at home and not go into the community.

If I have already been diagnosed with H1N1 flu and am no longer symptomatic, do I need the H1N1 flu vaccine?

No recommendation is yet available from the CDC, but if you are in a target group for vaccine, Idaho health officials recommend getting the vaccine. **7**

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Who should get vaccinated to prevent pandemic H1N1 flu?

There are several companies working to develop a vaccination for H1N1 flu. We expect that this shot will be available in the fall. It is good to speak to your medical provider on how flu vaccine will best work for you. You will hear on the news when vaccines for pandemic H1N1 flu and “regular” or seasonal flu arrive in your community.

CDC’s Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) has recommended that certain groups of the population receive the H1N1 flu vaccine when it first becomes available. These key populations include:

- ◆ pregnant women,
- ◆ people who live with or care for children younger than 6 months of age,
- ◆ healthcare and emergency medical services personnel,
- ◆ persons between the ages of 6 months and 24 years old,
- ◆ and people ages of 25 through 64 years of age who are at higher risk for H1N1 flu because of asthma, diabetes, chronic illness, or compromised immune systems.

We do not expect that there will be a shortage of H1N1 flu vaccine, but availability and demand can be unpredictable. There is some possibility that initially the vaccine will be available in limited quantities. In this setting, the committee recommended that the following groups receive the vaccine before others:

- pregnant women
- people who live with or care for children younger than 6 months of age
- health care and emergency services personnel with direct patient contact
- children 6 months through 4 years of age, and
- children 5 through 18 years of age who have chronic medical conditions.

The committee recognized the need to assess supply and demand issues at the local level. The committee further recommended that once the demand for vaccine for these prioritized groups has been met at the local level, programs and providers should begin vaccinating everyone from ages 25 through 64 years. Current studies indicate the risk for infection among persons age 65 or older is less than the risk for younger age groups. Therefore, as vaccine supply and demand for vaccine among younger age groups is being met, programs and providers should offer vaccination to people over the age of 65.

Can I catch pandemic H1N1 flu by eating pork or from my pigs?

No. H1N1 flu viruses are not transmitted by food. The U.S. residents infected with H1N1 flu virus had no direct contact with pigs. The risk of transmission for the new H1N1 flu virus in the U. S. is from humans not pigs.

