

Answers to Frequently Asked Questions about H1N1 (Swine Influenza)

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(Adapted from Questions and Answers Prepared by the Centers for Disease Control)

What is novel H1N1 (swine flu)?

Novel H1N1 (referred to as “swine flu” early on) is a new influenza virus causing illness in people. This virus is spreading from person-to-person worldwide, probably in much the same way that regular seasonal influenza viruses spread. On June 11, 2009, the World Health Organization (WHO) signaled that a pandemic of H1N1 flu was underway.

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

Yes. The first cases of human infection were reported in Southern California and near San Antonio, Tex. in late spring 2009. There have been many confirmed cases since then. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and local and state health agencies are monitoring the situation.

Are there any cases of H1N1 reported in Virginia?

Yes. The Virginia Department of Health confirmed the state’s first cases of swine flu on Thursday, April 30, 2009.

What is Virginia doing to protect its citizens?

The Virginia Department of Health (VDH) routinely monitors influenza activity. In light of the current situation, the VDH has alerted health care providers, schools and businesses about the symptoms of swine flu. Together, they are investigating any reports of influenza-like activity. VDH suggests you receive a seasonal influenza and H1N1 vaccination. VDH will follow the CDC’s recommendation for vaccine distribution.

What are the signs and symptoms of H1N1 in people?

The symptoms of H1N1 flu are similar to the symptoms of regular seasonal flu. They include: fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills, fatigue, diarrhea and vomiting.

How does H1N1 spread?

Like seasonal influenza, people infected with H1N1 flu can spread the infection from person to person through coughing or sneezing. Sometimes people may become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth, nose or eyes.

Individuals who have close contact with pigs (e.g. working on a farm with pigs or livestock exhibits at fairs) may also be at higher risk for contracting swine flu.

How long is an infected person contagious?

Infected people may be contagious one day before symptoms develop and up to seven or more days after becoming sick.

What should I do to keep from getting the flu?

Wash your hands. This is a simple and easy way to prevent the spread of the infection.

Additionally, try to stay in good general health. Get plenty of sleep, stay physically active, manage stress, drink plenty of fluids and eat nutritious food.

Try not touch surfaces that may be contaminated with the flu virus. Avoid close contact with people who are sick.

Are there medicines to treat H1N1?

Yes. The CDC recommends the use of oseltamivir (Tamiflu) or zanamivir (Relenza) for the treatment and/or prevention of swine flu. These antiviral drugs are prescription medicines 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). For more information about treatments, visit www.cdc.gov/h1n1/recommendations.htm.

How long can an infected person spread H1N1 to others?

You should assume that an infected person is contagious as long as they exhibit symptoms.

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 move through the air. Germs can be spread when a person touches respiratory droplets from another person on a surface like a desk and then touches their own eyes, mouth or nose before washing their hands.

How long can viruses live outside the body?

We know that some viruses and bacteria can live two hours or longer on surfaces like cafeteria tables, door knobs, telephones and desks. Frequent handwashing will help you reduce the chance of getting contamination from these common surfaces.

What can I do to protect myself from getting sick?

A vaccine is expected during Fall 2009. VDH suggests that individuals receive both a seasonal influenza and an H1N1 vaccine.

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.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.

If you are sick, stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.

What is the best way to keep from spreading the virus through coughing or sneezing?

If you are sick, limit your contact with other people as much as possible. Do not go to work or school if ill. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. It may prevent those around you from getting sick. Put your used tissue in the waste basket. Cover your cough or sneeze with your sleeve or elbow if you do not have a tissue. Then, clean your hands, and do so every time you cough or sneeze.

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

Wash your hands with soap and water for 15 to 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, clean your hands with alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

What should I do if I get sick?

Contact your health care provider if you have underlying medical conditions that could place you at high-risk for infections. 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 H1N1 influenza from eating or preparing pork?

No. H1N1 viruses are not spread by food. You cannot get this type of influenza from eating properly handled and cooked pork products.

How serious is H1N1 infection?

Like seasonal flu, H1N1 in humans can vary in severity from mild to severe. VDH encourages individuals to get a vaccine for both H1N1 and seasonal influenza.

Individuals wanting more information about H1N1 should visit the Centers for Disease Control Web site, www.cdc.gov/h1n1, or the Virginia Department of Health Web site, www.vdh.virginia.gov. For local information, visit www.HealthyVB.com.