

# H1N1 Influenza and You

from <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/qa.htm>

## What is H1N1flu?

2009 H1N1 (referred to as “swine flu” early on) is a new influenza virus causing illness in people. This new virus was first detected in people in the United States in April 2009. 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 signaled that a pandemic of 2009 H1N1 flu was underway.

## Why is 2009 H1N1 virus sometimes called “swine flu”?

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 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 genes from flu viruses that normally circulate in pigs in Europe and Asia and bird genes and human genes. Scientists call this a “quadruple reassortant” virus.

## I've heard that the H1N1 virus is contagious; how does it spread?

H1N1 is thought to spread in the same way as seasonal flu. 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 – such as a surface or object – with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose.

## What are the signs and symptoms of swine flu in people?

Illness with the new H1N1 virus has ranged from mild to severe. The symptoms of swine 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 swine flu. People may be infected with the flu, including 2009 H1N1, and have respiratory symptoms without a fever. Like seasonal flu, swine flu may cause a worsening of underlying chronic medical conditions, or result in severe illness (pneumonia and respiratory failure) and some deaths have been reported.

## How can someone with the flu infect someone else?

Infected people may be able to infect others beginning 1 day before symptoms develop and up to 7 or more days after becoming sick. That means that you may be able to pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick.

## What should I do to keep from getting the flu?

First and most important: wash your hands. Try to stay in good general health. Get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage your 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 swine flu?

Yes. CDC recommends the use of oseltamivir or zanamivir for the treatment and/or prevention of infection with these swine 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 this virus to others?

People infected with seasonal and 2009 H1N1 flu shed virus and may be able to infect others from 1 day before getting sick to 5 to 7 days after. This can be longer in some people, especially children and people with weakened immune systems and in people infected with the new H1N1 virus.

## 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 before washing their hands. Droplets

from a cough or sneeze of an infected person move through the air.

## How long can viruses live outside the body?

We know that some viruses and bacteria can live 2 hours or longer on surfaces like cafeteria tables, doorknobs, and desks. Frequent hand washing will help you reduce the chance of getting contamination from these common surfaces.

## What is the best way to keep from spreading the virus?

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. Put your used tissue in the waste basket. Cover your cough or sneeze if you do not have a tissue. Then, clean your hands, and do so every time you cough or sneeze.

## What should I do if I get sick? What are emergency warning signs of complications?

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 are worried about your symptoms, you may want to contact your health provider.

Seek emergency medical care if you experience any of the these warning signs: 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 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.

## Preventing the Flu: Good Health Habits Can Help Stop Germs



Good health habits like covering your cough and washing your hands often can help stop the spread of germs and prevent respiratory illnesses like the flu. There also are flu antiviral drugs that can be used to treat and prevent the flu.

- **Avoid close contact** with people who are sick. When you are sick, keep your distance from others to protect them from getting sick too.
- If possible, **stay home** from work, school, and errands when you are sick. You will help prevent others from catching your illness.
- **Cover your mouth** and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. It may prevent those around you from getting sick.
- **Throw tissues away in a waste basket.** Do not leave discarded tissues on your desk or other surfaces.
- **Clean your hands**— Washing your hands often will help protect you from germs. Wash your hands for 15 to 20 seconds with **soap and warm water** or clean with **alcohol-based disposable hand wipes** or **gel sanitizers**. If you're using alcohol-based gel sanitizers, 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.
- **Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.** Germs are often spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose, or mouth.
- **Practice other good health habits.** Get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids, and eat nutritious food.

## Keep in touch with the most recent CDC messages through the following links:

[http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/vaccination/public/vaccination\\_qa\\_pub.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/vaccination/public/vaccination_qa_pub.htm)

[http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/general\\_info.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/general_info.htm)

<http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/whatsnew.htm>