



By now, you've heard a great deal about the 2009 H1N1 flu. Although this influenza has become a pandemic, it's no time to panic. Are you a little unclear about how this flu is different than seasonal flu? Do you want to know how to protect yourself and your family? Here's what you need to know.

H1N1 was originally called swine flu because it was similar to viruses that spread between pigs – yes, pigs get the flu, too. The virus changed so it was able to infect people, and spread quickly from person to person. Now we know that H1N1 virus has a combination of genes from pig, human, and bird flu viruses. In June, H1N1 became a pandemic. It began causing illness in several parts of the world.

Although 2009 H1N1 is a new type of flu, it causes many of the same symptoms as regular seasonal flu. If you get H1N1, you're likely to have at least two flu symptoms, such as cough, sore throat, runny nose, body aches, chills, fatigue, and fever of 100 degrees or more. Sound familiar? You may also experience diarrhea and vomiting.

Because this flu is so similar to regular flu, you may not be able to tell the difference between them. So what should you do if you get sick? First of all, stay home unless you need medical care! To prevent its spread, you need to stay home until at least 24 hours after your untreated fever is gone.

Prescription antiviral medications may be given to those who are at highest risk. Seek immediate medical care if you develop *severe* flu symptoms or if you become ill and are part of a group at higher risk for complications. This includes children, pregnant women, and people with chronic medical conditions, such as diabetes, asthma, heart or kidney disease, depressed immune systems, or neurological disorders. People over 65 are usually at higher risk with seasonal flu. So far, though, they have been less hard hit by H1N1 than younger people. This could be because they have acquired some immunity against this strain of flu.

Regardless of age or risk group, however, **seek emergency care** if any of the following warning signs appear.

In a child:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish or gray skin color
- Severe vomiting or vomiting that lasts
- Not drinking enough
- Not waking up or interacting
- Extreme irritability
- Flu symptoms that improve, then return with fever and severe cough

In an adult:

- Trouble breathing and shortness of breath
- Chest or abdominal pain or pressure
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe vomiting or vomiting that lasts
- Flu symptoms that improve, then return with a fever and severe cough

To prevent getting H1N1, get vaccinated as soon as possible, especially if you are part of a high-risk group. The virus is spread mainly through coughing and sneezing. Or you may get it by touching something that contains the virus, then touching your mouth or nose. So these steps can also help prevent its spread:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water. You can also use an alcohol-based hand cleaner or gel sanitizer. If using a gel, rub your hands until they become dry.
- Avoid touching your mouth, nose, or eyes with your hands.
- When you cough or sneeze, cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or shirtsleeve. Then throw tissues in the trash.
- Keep surfaces clean with a household disinfectant.
- Avoid crowded places or contact with sick people as much as you can.
- Stay home if you show signs of illness.

Think about what you might need if you get sick. Store extra food and water. Come to the pharmacy and get a supply of tissues, over-the-counter medications, hand sanitizers, and other supplies. This way, you won't need to make trips when you're sick. Come talk to me about any of your concerns, including ways you can get your prescriptions filled if you're ill. Or, if you're sick and have questions, don't hesitate calling or emailing your doctor or me.

For more information, visit www.healthmart.com or www.pandemicflu.gov/.



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