

H1N1 (Swine) Flu: 7 Ways to Help Avoid Infection

With the spread of the influenza A (H1N1) flu virus, also called swine flu, people are looking for things they can do to avoid getting sick. Here are some simple steps you can take to lower your risk of infection.

1. Wash your hands often and well. Handwashing is an easy but powerful way to prevent swine flu and many other types of infection.

- Use soap (any type will do) and warm water.
- Scrub for 20 seconds (count slowly to be sure you spent enough time). Be sure to clean between your fingers and under and around your fingernails.
- Rinse well under running water, and dry with a clean towel or paper towel.
- Use your towel to turn off the water and open the door so you don't get germs on your hands.

If you don't have access to soap and water, use an alcohol-based hand rub. Apply the product to your palm and rub your hands together, covering all surfaces of your hands and fingers, until dry.

2. Keep your hands away from your eyes, nose and mouth. Flu germs can live for a couple of hours on surfaces such as doorknobs and desks. They can enter your body if you touch a contaminated surface and then touch your eyes, nose or mouth.

3. Steer clear of sick people. Try to avoid close contact with people who are sick. Stay out of crowds if there's a swine flu outbreak in your area.

4. Cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze. Use a tissue and then throw it away. If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your elbow. Then wash your hands well to get rid of the germs.

5. Ask your doctor if you should wear a facemask or respirator. Some people are at high risk for flu complications. They may need to wear a facemask or respirator if they could be exposed to the H1N1 virus, either by caring for someone who has the flu or by being in a large crowd during a local outbreak of H1N1 flu. Your doctor can tell you if you are at high risk and what type of protection you should use.

6. Build your defenses. Keep your immune system strong by eating a healthy diet, getting plenty of sleep and getting regular exercise. Always talk to your doctor before you increase your activity level.

7. Stay well-informed. Listen to local newscasts to stay abreast of school closures or other alerts. For the latest information on swine flu, call the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Hotline at 800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636). Information is available in English and Spanish, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

If you get swine flu

Sometimes even the best prevention fails. Call your doctor if you develop symptoms of swine flu. These can include fever, headache, fatigue, sore throat, cough and body aches. Some people also have vomiting and diarrhea. Your doctor can tell you if you need testing or treatment.

If you do get swine flu, stay home for seven days after your symptoms started. This can help keep the disease from spreading.