

H1N1 (Swine) Flu: Disinfect Your Home

Washing your hands and keeping surfaces in your home clean and disinfected can help prevent the spread of illness and keep you and your family well.

There is still much to learn about the H1N1 flu virus (swine flu). But past experience with seasonal flu, plus common sense, probably still applies.

Germs are most often spread when a sick person coughs or sneezes. Droplets from an infected family member can move through the air and land on surfaces in the home. The virus is thought to be able to live on surfaces for up to 2 to 8 hours. If you touch the surface within that time frame, then touch your eyes, nose or mouth before washing your hands, you could get sick.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends washing your hands with soap and water, or using hand sanitizer, after touching surfaces that may be infected with the virus.

Keep surfaces clean. Pay special attention to bedside tables, bathroom and kitchen surfaces, toys, phones, computer keyboards and doorknobs. Wipe them down with a household disinfectant. Follow the directions on the product label.

Chlorine bleach, hydrogen peroxide, detergents, soaps, antiseptics and alcohol are all effective against human influenza viruses if used properly. Again, follow all label instructions carefully. The CDC believes these products should also work against H1N1 or swine flu virus.

Keep trash cans handy. To prevent the spread of virus, throw away tissues and other disposable items (such as paper cups or plates) right away. Keep trash cans available throughout your home. Always wash your hands after you touch a used tissue or empty the garbage.

Keep linens clean. Don't share bed sheets or towels if anyone in your home is sick. You don't have to wash linens separately, though. Just use your usual household laundry soap and tumble dry on a hot setting.

Avoid "hugging" dirty laundry as you collect it and put it in the washer. Wash your hands right away after handling dirty laundry. Consider using paper towels to dry your hands after washing. Or, give each member of your household a separate towel (label towels or choose a unique color for each person).

Cleaning dishes and utensils. Don't share dishes or eating utensils before they are washed. These items can be washed in the dishwasher or by hand with dish soap and water. If you use paper plates or cups, throw them away after a single use.

Keep your home well ventilated. If weather permits, open windows in bathrooms, bedrooms and kitchen.