

Novel H1N1 Flu: Answers to Frequently Asked Questions

Overview

Frequently asked questions about the novel H1N1 virus.

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- What are novel H1N1 flu symptoms?
- How severe is the novel H1N1 virus?
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What is novel H1N1 flu?

Novel H1N1 influenza is a contagious new flu virus that first appeared in people in the U.S. in April 2009. The virus is thought to spread from person to person through coughs and sneezes, much like the seasonal flu spreads. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared a novel H1N1 flu pandemic in June 2009, which means that the virus has caused widespread infection among humans.

What are novel H1N1 flu symptoms?

The symptoms of novel H1N1 flu are similar to those of the regular human flu. Symptoms include: fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills, fatigue, diarrhea, and vomiting.

How severe is the novel H1N1 virus?

Cases of novel H1N1 flu range from mild to severe. Most people infected with the new virus have a mild case and recover without medical treatment. While the novel H1N1 flu has caused some hospitalizations and deaths, most people who became hospitalized with it had health conditions associated with a higher risk of medical complications from influenza, such as pregnancy, diabetes, heart disease, asthma, and kidney disease.

Is there a novel H1N1 flu vaccine?

Getting a flu vaccine is the best way to protect yourself from the flu. The seasonal flu vaccine is *not* likely to provide protection against the novel H1N1 flu. A separate H1N1 flu vaccine is in production and is expected to be available this fall. The new H1N1 flu vaccine is not intended to replace the seasonal flu vaccine -- you should get both immunizations to get the best protection against the flu this season.

To help reduce the impact and spread of the novel H1N1 virus, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends the following people get the H1N1 vaccine as soon as it becomes available:

- pregnant women
- people who live with or care for children younger than 6 months
- health care and emergency medical services personnel
- people between 6 months and 24 years old
- people between 25 and 64 years old who have health conditions associated with a higher risk of medical complications from influenza

What else can I do to avoid getting sick?

You can help avoid becoming infected with the novel H1N1 virus by taking the following actions:

- *Avoid close contact with people who are sick.*
- *Try not to touch your mouth, nose, or eyes.*
- *Frequently wash your hands with soap and water.* Make sure to wash for at least 15 seconds. Alcohol-based hand sanitizer is also effective when soap and running water are not available.
- *Practice healthy habits*, including getting plenty of sleep, being physically active, managing your stress, drinking plenty of fluids, and eating healthfully.

What should I do if I get sick?

Contact your health care provider if you develop flu symptoms. Your health care provider can determine whether you should be treated for flu. Those who become infected with novel H1N1 flu can be treated with Tamiflu and Relenza, antiviral medications that can ease symptoms and help prevent complications.

If you get sick, be sure to:

- *Limit contact with others.* Stay home until your fever has been gone for at least 24 hours. Also avoid traveling and crowds of people.
- *Keep sick children home from school or child care until they have been free of fever for at least 24 hours.*
- *Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you sneeze or cough.* Throw tissues in the trash immediately after using them, and then wash your hands. If you don't have a tissue, try to cough or sneeze into your elbow or upper sleeve.

Why was novel H1N1 flu originally called swine flu?

The novel H1N1 flu virus was originally referred to as *swine flu* because initial tests showed that it has many of the same genes found in flu viruses that infect pigs. However, more recent studies show that it also has bird and human genes.

Should I avoid eating pork?

No. Novel H1N1 flu is spread from person to person through coughs and sneezes -- not through preparing or eating properly cooked pork. Cooking pork to an internal temperature of 160 degrees Fahrenheit kills the virus, just as it kills other bacteria and viruses.

Where can I find more information?

You can find additional novel H1N1 flu information by visiting the CDC Web site at *www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu*. You can also visit the World Health Organization Web site at *www.who.int*.

This information is not a substitute for professional medical advice. Contact your health care provider whenever you experience symptoms that you are concerned about -- whether they are related to the novel H1N1 flu or any other medical issue.