

# *Protecting Yourself and Your Family from the Novel H1N1 Flu*

## **Overview**

Information about the novel H1N1 flu and how to guard against the illness.

- What is novel H1N1 flu?
- The novel H1N1 flu vaccine
- Preventing the spread of a virus
- If you get sick

While cases of novel H1N1 flu have ranged from mild to severe, most people infected with the new virus have a mild case and recover without medical treatment. The novel H1N1 flu has caused some hospitalizations and deaths, but most people who became hospitalized with it had health conditions that put them at higher risk of complications from the flu, such as pregnancy, diabetes, heart disease, asthma, and kidney disease. You can help protect yourself and your family from the virus by being aware of flu symptoms, taking precautions to protect your health, and knowing what to do if you get sick.

## **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 World Health Organization (WHO) declared a novel H1N1 flu pandemic after the virus has caused widespread infection among humans. H1N1 flu is thought to spread from person to person through coughs and sneezes, much like the seasonal flu spreads. The symptoms of novel H1N1 flu are similar to those of the seasonal flu and include:

- fever
- cough
- sore throat
- runny or stuffy nose
- chills
- headaches
- body aches
- fatigue
- diarrhea
- vomiting

## **The novel H1N1 flu vaccine**

While flu vaccines provide the best protection against 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

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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.

To help reduce the impact and spread of the H1N1 virus, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends the following 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

While a shortage of the H1N1 vaccine is not expected, quantities may be limited at first. If initial supplies are limited, the CDC recommends that the following get vaccinated before others:

- pregnant women
- people who live with or care for children younger than 6 months
- health care and emergency services personnel with direct patient contact
- children age 6 months to 4 years old
- children age 5 to 18 years old who have chronic medical conditions

Once these groups have received the H1N1 vaccine, people between 25 and 64 years old should also get vaccinated. The risk for infection among people over 64 is lower than the risk for younger people. The CDC suggests that providers offer immunizations to people over 64 after the vaccine demand among younger age groups has been met.

### **Preventing the spread of a virus**

In addition to getting vaccinated, you can help prevent the spread of the novel H1N1 flu by taking the same actions you would to prevent other viruses:

- *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.

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- *Practice healthy habits*, including getting plenty of sleep, being physically active, managing your stress, drinking plenty of fluids, and eating healthfully.

You can also help prevent the spread of the novel H1N1 virus by being aware of your community's contingency plans.

- *Check with your local leaders, employers, and other community groups* about their plans to prevent the spread of the novel H1N1 virus in your community.
- *Talk with your child's school or care provider about their contingency plans*, and make sure you have a child care backup plan in place in case your child's school or care facility closes.
- *Talk with your employer about contingency plans*. Find out whether you can do any of your work from home in the event that your child's school or care facility closes.
- *Find out whether your older relative's care facility is prepared to deal with the new H1N1 virus*. If you have a cold or the flu, avoid visiting your older relative or friend in a nursing home or facility. Nursing home residents and hospital patients can be at higher risk for infection.

#### **If you get sick**

If you develop flu symptoms, your doctor can determine whether you should be treated with Tamiflu and Relenze, antiviral medications that fight the virus. Antiviral medications can also ease symptoms and help prevent complications.

Pregnant women, young children, and people with chronic medical conditions are at high risk for complications from the novel H1N1 flu. While people over 64 have an increased risk of complications from the seasonal flu, they do not appear to be at increased risk of complications related to the new H1N1 virus.

H1N1 flu can cause serious complications including pneumonia and respiratory failure. Seek medical attention immediately if you experience any of the following:

- difficulty breathing
- shortness of breath
- pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- sudden dizziness
- confusion
- severe or persistent vomiting

Children may show these additional emergency warning signs:

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- fast breathing
- trouble breathing
- bluish skin color
- not drinking enough
- not waking up
- not interacting
- being so irritable that they don't want to be held
- symptoms improve but then return with a fever and a worse cough
- fever with a rash

If you do 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.

For answers to frequently asked questions about novel H1N1 flu, visit the CDC Web site at [www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu](http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu). You can find additional H1N1 flu information online from the World Health Organization ([www.who.int](http://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.