



A California Corporation
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Q&A

H1N1

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Is 2009 H1N1 virus contagious?

The 2009 H1N1 virus (sometimes called “swine flu”) is contagious and is spreading from human to human.

How does 2009 H1N1 virus spread?

Spread of 2009 H1N1 virus is thought to occur in the same way that seasonal flu spreads. Flu viruses are spread mainly from person to person through coughing or sneezing by people with influenza. Sometimes people may become infected by touching something – such as a surface or object – with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose.

What are the signs and symptoms of this virus in people?

The symptoms of 2009 H1N1 flu virus in people include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people may have vomiting and diarrhea. People may be infected with the flu, including 2009 H1N1 and have respiratory symptoms without a fever. Severe illnesses and deaths have occurred as a result of illness associated with this virus.

How severe is illness associated with 2009 H1N1 flu virus?

Illness with 2009 H1N1 virus has ranged from mild to severe. While most people who have been sick have recovered without needing medical treatment, hospitalizations and deaths from infection with this virus have occurred.

In seasonal flu, certain people are at “high risk” of serious complications. This includes:

- people 65 years and older
- children younger than five years old
- pregnant women
- and people of any age with certain chronic medical conditions.

About 70 percent of people who have been hospitalized with this 2009 H1N1 virus have had one or more medical conditions previously recognized as placing people at “high risk” of serious seasonal flu-related complications. This includes pregnancy, diabetes, heart disease, asthma, and kidney disease.

Young children are at high risk of serious complications from 2009 H1N1, just as they are with the seasonal flu. And while people 65 and older are the least likely to be infected with 2009

H1N1 flu, if they get sick, they are also at high risk of developing serious complications from their illness.

Center for Disease Control (CDC) laboratory studies have shown that no children and very few adults younger than 60 years old have existing antibody to 2009 H1N1 flu virus; however, about one-third of adults older than 60 may have antibodies against this virus. It is unknown how much, if any, protection may be afforded against 2009 H1N1 flu by any existing antibody.

How does 2009 H1N1 flu compare to seasonal flu in terms of its severity and infection rates?

With seasonal flu, we know that seasons vary in terms of timing, duration, and severity. Seasonal influenza can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death. Each year, in the United States, on average 36,000 people die from flu-related complications and more than 200,000 people are hospitalized from flu-related causes. Of those hospitalized, 20,000 are children younger than 5 years old. Over 90% of deaths and about 60 percent of hospitalization occur in people older than 65.

When the 2009 H1N1 outbreak was first detected in mid-April 2009, CDC began working with states to collect, compile and analyze information regarding the 2009 H1N1 flu outbreak, including the numbers of confirmed and probable cases and the ages of these people. The information analyzed by CDC supports the conclusion that 2009 H1N1 flu has caused greater disease burden in people younger than 25 years of age than older people.

At this time, there are relatively few cases and deaths reported in people 65 years and older, which is unusual when compared with seasonal flu. However, pregnancy and other previously recognized high risk medical conditions from seasonal influenza appear to be associated with increased risk of complications from this 2009 H1N1. These underlying conditions include asthma, diabetes, suppressed immune systems, heart disease, kidney disease, neurocognitive and neuromuscular disorders, and pregnancy.

How long can an infected person spread this virus to others?

People infected with seasonal and 2009 H1N1 flu shed virus and may be able to infect others from 1 day before getting sick to 5 to 7 days after. This can be longer in some people, especially children and people with weakened immune systems and in people infected with the new H1N1 virus.

What can I do to protect myself from getting sick?

This season, there is a seasonal flu vaccine to protect against seasonal flu viruses and a 2009 H1N1 vaccine to protect against the 2009 H1N1 influenza virus. A flu vaccine is the first and most important step in protecting against flu infection. For information about the 2009 H1N1 vaccines, visit [H1N1 Flu Vaccination Resources](#).

Save Mart and Lucky Pharmacies have registered with the government to receive injectable H1N1 vaccine as supplies are released. Keep checking back for news on when clinics will be offered once vaccine arrives.

There are also everyday actions that can help prevent the spread of germs that cause respiratory illnesses like the flu.

Take these everyday steps to protect your health:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- If you are sick with flu-like illness, CDC recommends that you stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone except to get medical care or for other necessities. (Your fever should be gone without the use of a fever-reducing medicine.) Keep away from others as much as possible to keep from making others sick.

Other important actions that you can take are:

- Follow public health advice regarding school closures, avoiding crowds and other social distancing measures.
- Be prepared in case you get sick and need to stay home for a week or so. A supply of over-the-counter medicines, alcohol-based hand rubs (for when soap and water are not available), tissues, and other related items could help you to avoid the need to make trips out in public while you are sick and contagious.

What is the best way to keep from spreading the virus through coughing or sneezing?

Keep away from others as much as possible. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. Put your used tissue in the waste basket. Then, clean your hands, and do so every time you cough or sneeze.

If I have a family member at home who is sick with 2009 H1N1 flu, should I go to work?

Employees who are well but who have an ill family member at home with 2009 H1N1 flu can go to work as usual. These employees should monitor their health every day, and take everyday precautions, including covering their coughs and sneezes and washing their hands often with soap and water (especially after they cough or sneeze). If soap and water are not available, they should use an alcohol-based hand rub.

If they become ill, they should notify their supervisor and stay home. Employees who have an underlying medical condition or who are pregnant should call their health care provider for advice, because they might need to receive influenza antiviral drugs.

What is the best technique for washing my hands to avoid getting the flu?

CDC recommends that when you wash your hands – with soap and warm water – that you wash for 15 to 20 seconds. When soap and water are not available, alcohol-based disposable hand wipes or gel sanitizers may be used. You can find them in most supermarkets and drugstores. If using gel, rub your hands until the gel is dry. The gel doesn't need water to work; the alcohol in it kills the germs on your hands.

What should I do if I get sick?

If you get sick with flu-like symptoms this flu season, you should stay home and avoid contact with other people except to get medical care. Most people with 2009 H1N1 have had mild illness and have not needed medical care or antiviral drugs, and the same is true of seasonal flu.

However, some people are more likely to get flu complications and they should talk to a health care provider about whether they need to be examined if they get flu symptoms this season.

They are:

- Children younger than 5, but especially children younger than 2 years old
- People 65 and older
- Pregnant women
- People who have:
 - Cancer
 - Blood disorders (including sickle cell disease)
 - Chronic lung disease [including asthma or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)]
 - Diabetes
 - Heart disease
 - Kidney disorders
 - Liver disorders
 - Neurological disorders (including nervous system, brain or spinal cord)
 - Neuromuscular disorders (including muscular dystrophy and multiple sclerosis)
 - Weakened immune systems (including people with AIDS)

Also, it's possible for healthy people to develop severe illness from the flu so anyone concerned about their illness should consult a health care provider.

There are emergency warning signs. Anyone who has them should get medical care right away.

What are the emergency warning signs?

In children:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Not waking up or not interacting
- Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough
- Fever with a rash

In adults:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting

Do I need to go the emergency room if I am only a little sick?

No. The emergency room should be used for people who are very sick. You should not go to the emergency room if you are only mildly ill.

If you have the emergency warning signs of flu sickness, you should go to the emergency room. If you get sick with flu symptoms and are at high risk of flu complications or you are concerned about your illness, call your health care provider for advice.

If you go to the emergency room and you are not sick with the flu, you may catch it from people who do have it.

Are there medicines to treat 2009 H1N1?

Yes. There are drugs your doctor may prescribe for treating both seasonal and 2009 H1N1 called “antiviral drugs.” These drugs can make you better faster and may also prevent serious complications.

This flu season, antiviral drugs are being used mainly to treat people who are very sick, such as people who need to be hospitalized, and to treat sick people who are more likely to get serious flu complications. Your health care provider will decide whether antiviral drugs are needed to treat your illness. Remember, most people with 2009 H1N1 have had mild illness and have not needed medical care or antiviral drugs and the same is true of seasonal flu.

How long should I stay home if I’m sick?

CDC recommends that you stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone, except to get medical care or for other things you have to do and no one else can do for you. (Your fever should be gone without the use of a fever-reducing medicine, such as acetaminophen.) You should stay home from work, school, travel, shopping, social events, and public gatherings.

What should I do while I’m sick?

Stay away from others as much as possible to keep from making them sick. If you must leave home – to get medical care, for example – wear a face mask if you have one, or cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue. And wash your hands often to keep from spreading flu to others.

(Information taken from <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/vaccination/general.htm> and <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/qa.htm> November 3, 2009)

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