



## **NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE**

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### **H1N1 Flu: What New Yorkers Need to Know**

#### **What is H1N1 flu?**

This condition, also known as “swine flu,” is caused by a newly identified influenza virus called H1N1 (SO). The virus is genetically related to influenza viruses found in pigs and birds. Since April 2009, it has caused outbreaks of flu-like illness among people in New York City and in many countries around the world.

#### **What are the symptoms of H1N1 flu?**

The symptoms appear to be similar to those of seasonal flu and usually include fever accompanied by cough, sore throat, fatigue, headache, body aches, lethargy, stuffy nose or chills. Some affected people have also reported diarrhea and vomiting.

#### **How does H1N1 flu spread?**

Human transmission is thought to occur in the same way as seasonal flu: through respiratory droplets that are released when an infected person coughs or sneezes. These droplets can infect people in close proximity.

#### **How long is a person with H1N1 flu contagious?**

People with H1N1 flu can spread the infection while sick and scientists believe that they may remain contagious for up to 24 hours after their symptoms resolve.

#### **How severe is H1N1 flu?**

All types of influenza, including common seasonal flu, can cause severe illness and death in susceptible people. In the United States, most confirmed cases of H1N1 flu have been mild so far, but as more people experience H1N1 flu, some severe illness and death is likely.

#### **How can I protect myself from H1N1 flu?**

Take the same precautions you would to avoid regular seasonal flu and other respiratory infections:

- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand cleaner.
- Avoid touching your nose, mouth or eyes.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people or things such as kissing, sharing toothbrushes, cigarettes or drinks

#### **What should I do if I have influenza or a fever and a cough?**

- Stay home until your symptoms resolve, and don't return to work or school until you have been well for at least 24 hours.
- Avoid going to the hospital if you have mild flu-like symptoms such as fever and cough – even if you think you could have H1N1 flu. People with flu usually recover without medical treatment, but other illnesses can cause fever, so call your doctor if you are in doubt. You should rest, drink plenty of liquids and take the medications you would normally use to treat symptoms. People under 18 should *not* take aspirin or aspirin-containing products such as Pepto-Bismol™. Aspirin can cause a rare but serious illness called Reye's Syndrome in young people with the flu.
- Cover your mouth with a tissue when sneezing, coughing or blowing your nose. Clean your hands afterwards, using soap and warm water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

### **Who is at risk of complications from H1N1 flu?**

Some people have a higher risk of complications from common seasonal flu, so they may also be at higher risk of complications from H1N1 flu. These include:

- People over 65 years old
- Children less than two years old
- People with lung, heart, kidney, liver or blood disorders, and those with compromised immune systems
- People on long-term aspirin therapy
- Pregnant women

### **Are pregnant women at greater risk of complications from H1N1 flu?**

Pregnant women with H1N1 flu present with typical symptoms of regular human flu such as fever and cough. However, influenza may be more severe in pregnant women and they have a higher risk of complications from common seasonal flu, so they may also be at higher risk of complications from H1N1 flu. If you are pregnant and have symptoms of flu, such as fever and cough, consult with your doctor.

### **Should I be tested for H1N1 flu?**

Doctors in the community cannot test patients for the H1N1 (SO) virus. Confirming this infection is a costly and complicated process, so the Health Department is testing only those patients who develop severe symptoms and need to be admitted to the hospital. Knowing which type of flu you have will not change the treatment you receive. It simply helps health authorities track the spread of disease.

### **How can people with influenza avoid spreading it to others?**

- Limit your contact with others while you're sick. Avoid close contact such as kissing, and don't share toothbrushes or drinks.

- Always cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when sneezing, coughing or blowing your nose.
- Always wash your hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer after coughing, sneezing or handling a used tissue. Don't touch phones, doorknobs or other shared items before washing your hands.
- People with flu should consider wearing a surgical mask when they must be near other people (for example, when being cared for). A surgical mask is a soft fabric mask that covers the nose and mouth to prevent germs from spreading and can be purchased at pharmacies and hardware stores.

### **If I am sick do I need to take medicine?**

- You should only take medicine if your doctor prescribes it for you. For people with severe illness or certain underlying medical conditions, the antiviral medicines Tamiflu® (oseltamivir) and Relenza™ (zanamivir) may be recommended to treat H1N1 flu symptoms. You should consult with your doctor to see if you need medicine. Most flu lasts only a few days, and most people recover completely without medication, so use it only if your doctor recommends it.
- You should also rest, drink plenty of liquids and take medications that you would normally take to treat your symptoms, such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen. If you have other underlying medical conditions, you should consult with your doctor. People who are under 18 years of age should NOT take aspirin or aspirin-containing products (e.g., Pepto-Bismol™), as this can cause a rare serious illness called Reye's Syndrome in young people with the flu.

### **Should people I live with or other close contacts take medicine to prevent H1N1?**

Most people who live with or have close contact with people with influenza H1N1 SO virus do NOT need to take any medication to prevent illness. To find out whether preventive medication such as oseltamivir (Tamiflu®) or zanamavir (Relenza®) is recommended, call a doctor.

### **What precautions are needed in a living space where someone has influenza?**

- Have the affected person stay away from common areas of the house or apartment as much as possible until 24 hours after symptoms resolve.
- Consider designating one person (not someone who is pregnant, if possible) as the primary caretaker to limit the number of people exposed to the infection.
- Household members of the sick person should monitor themselves closely for flu-like symptoms. If they get sick with fever and cough, they should stay at home and take the same precautions listed above.
- If you handle the affected person's laundry, wash it with household laundry detergent and tumble dry it on a hot setting. Avoid "hugging" dirty laundry, and clean your hands after handling it. It's not necessary to separate a sick person's laundry from other household laundry.
- See sections below on masks and household cleaning.

### **Should the person who is sick wear a mask?**

When close contact with other people in the home is unavoidable, the sick person should consider wearing a surgical mask to help prevent the spread of the virus. Surgical masks can be purchased in pharmacies, medical supply or hardware stores. The person applying or removing the mask should wash their hands or use an alcohol-based hand rub afterward.

### **Should other people in the household wear masks?**

Close contacts may consider using a facemask (e.g. surgical mask). If a reusable fabric facemask is used, it should be laundered with normal laundry detergent and tumble-dried in a hot dryer. The person applying or removing the mask should wash their hands or use an alcohol-based hand rub afterward.

### **What should I use to clean household surfaces?**

- Household cleaners, or soap and water, are usually adequate. Household disinfectants may offer extra protection on frequently contacted surfaces, such as bedside tables, bathroom surfaces, doorknobs, refrigerator door handles, telephones and children's toys. If hard surfaces are visibly dirty, clean them before applying a disinfectant and rinsing. Additional information on registered disinfectants and antimicrobial products is available at <http://www.epa.gov/oppad001/influenza-disinfectants.html> and [http://www.nyhealth.gov/diseases/communicable/influenza/seasonal/swine\\_flu/cleaning\\_and\\_disinfectants.htm](http://www.nyhealth.gov/diseases/communicable/influenza/seasonal/swine_flu/cleaning_and_disinfectants.htm).
- Never mix bleach with cleaning products – the mixture may create hazardous vapors. If you don't have a disinfectant, use a chlorine bleach solution made by adding 1 tablespoon of bleach to a quart (4 cups) of water. Discard bleach solution after you use it.

### **What should I do if my symptoms worsen?**

If your illness gets worse, seek medical attention from your doctor or a hospital emergency department. Take a private car or taxi to get there. When you arrive, go straight to the receptionist or triage nurse and explain that you have flu-like symptoms. You may be asked to wear a mask or sit in a separate area. If you call an ambulance to take you to the hospital, let the 911 operator know that you have flu-like symptoms and tell ambulance crew, too.

### **Signs that an adult needs urgent medical care:**

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

### **Signs that a child needs urgent medical care:**

- 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
- Fever with a rash

**If I live with someone who has flu-like illness, can I go to work or school?**

Yes, a person who lives with someone who has flu-like illness can go to work or school as they always do. They should just make sure to go home right away if they start to feel sick and then use the precautions described above for people with fever and cough.

**Should I send my children to school?**

Yes, all healthy children should go to school unless their school has officially been closed.

**What if my workplace or school is requiring a negative flu test before I or my child can return?**

Those with mild illness do not need to be tested. If a school or employer demands testing, refer them to information on the Health Department website at [www.nyc.gov/health](http://www.nyc.gov/health).

**Is there a vaccine for H1N1 flu?**

At this time, there is no vaccine for H1N1 flu. Vaccination against seasonal flu does not provide protection against H1N1 flu. This makes precautions, such as covering coughs and washing hands, all the more important.

**Is it safe to travel?**

The CDC currently recommends avoiding non-essential travel to Mexico. See [www.cdc.gov/travel/content/SwineFluMexico.aspx](http://www.cdc.gov/travel/content/SwineFluMexico.aspx).

**What can I do if the situation feels overwhelming?**

Remember to take care of your emotional health. Being home and not feeling well can be very stressful. Here are some tips for managing your stress:

- Stay connected to family, friends and social groups by telephone and e-mail.
- Obtain essential information on the outbreak to ease your anxiety, but avoid watching report after report about the outbreak. The repetition can be distressing, especially for children. Parents should limit children’s news watching. Watch the news with your children and tell them what is going on.
- Understand that recuperation takes time. Don’t be afraid to ask for help

If the stress feels overwhelming, consider seeking professional help or calling 800-LIFENET, a 24-hour, 7-day-a-week crisis hotline. LifeNet is staffed by mental-health professionals who speak a variety of languages.

- English: 800-LIFENET (800-543-3638)
- Spanish: 877-AYUDESE (877-298-33730)
- Asian languages: 877-990-8585
- Deaf/Hearing Impaired (TTY): 212-982-5284 or [www.mhaofnyc.org](http://www.mhaofnyc.org).

For facts about influenza, and more information about H1N1 flu, please visit the Health Department and CDC websites. Some specific resources:

**From New York City Health Department**

[www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/cd/cd-h1n1flu.shtml](http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/cd/cd-h1n1flu.shtml)

**From Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**

[www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/general\\_info.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/general_info.htm)