

## Helpful Information about H1N1

Flu season has the potential to cause illness, doctors visits, hospitalizations and even deaths. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is concerned that the new H1N1 flu virus could result in a more severe flu season this year. Vaccines are the best tools we have to prevent the flu. CDC hopes that people will get vaccinated against H1N1 flu as soon as vaccines become available. The seasonal flu vaccine probably will not provide protection against the H1N1 flu virus. The good news is that **a H1N1 vaccine is scheduled to be ready for the public in the fall.** The H1N1 vaccine does not take the place of the seasonal flu vaccine. It is used along side the seasonal flu vaccine.

Certain groups are advised to receive the H1N1 flu vaccine. They include:

- **Pregnant women**
- **Caregivers for children younger than 6 months of age**
- **Healthcare and emergency medical services personnel**
- **All people from 6 months through 24 years of age**
- **Persons aged 25 through 64 years who have health conditions associated with higher risk of medical complications from flu**



### **What is H1N1 (swine flu)?**

H1N1 (referred to as “swine flu” early on) is a new flu virus causing illness in people. This virus was first found in people in the United States in April 2009. It is spreading from person-to-person worldwide. It probably spreads in much the same way that regular seasonal flu viruses spread.

### **Are there human infections with H1N1 virus in the U.S.?**

Yes. Human infections with the H1N1 virus are ongoing in the United States. Most people who become ill with this virus have recovered without medical treatment.

### **How does H1N1 virus spread?**

Spread of H1N1 virus is thought to occur in the same way that seasonal flu spreads. People spread flu viruses mainly from person to person through coughing or sneezing. Touching the surface of an object that has the flu viruses on it and then touching the mouth or nose can sometimes infect people.

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

The symptoms of H1N1 flu virus in people include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Many people have also reported diarrhea and vomiting. The H1N1 virus has also caused severe illnesses and death.

### **How severe is illness associated with H1N1 flu virus?**

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

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

The CDC has found that H1N1 flu has caused greater disease burden in people younger than 25 years of age than older people. At this time, there are few cases and few deaths reported in people older than 64 years old. This is unusual when compared with seasonal flu. Pregnancy and other high-risk medical conditions appear to be associated with increased risk of complications from the H1N1 virus. This is similar to the seasonal flu. Such conditions include asthma, diabetes, suppressed immune systems, heart disease, kidney disease, neurocognitive and neuromuscular disorders and pregnancy.

### **What can I do to protect myself from getting sick?**

There is no vaccine available right now to protect against H1N1 virus. However, a H1N1 vaccine is currently in production. It may be ready for the public in the fall. As always, a vaccine will be available to protect against seasonal flu. There are 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. Make sure to do this after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
- 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:**

- 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. Have a supply of over-the-counter medicines, alcohol-based hand rubs, and tissues and other related items. By having the supplies on hand, you will avoid the need to make trips out in public while you are sick and contagious.

### **Are there medicines to treat H1N1 infection?**

Yes. CDC recommends the use of Tamiflu (oseltamivir) or Relenza (zanamivir) for the treatment and/or prevention of infection with H1N1 flu virus. Antiviral drugs are prescription medicines (pills, liquid or an inhaled powder) that fight against the flu by keeping flu viruses from reproducing in your body. If you get sick, antiviral drugs can

make your illness milder and make you feel better faster. They may also prevent serious flu complications. Contact your PCP promptly if you think you may have H1N1. He or she can help you determine if a prescription antiviral medication is appropriate.