

Novel H1N1 (Swine Flu) FAQ

What is novel H1N1 (swine flu)?

Novel H1N1 (or “swine flu”) is a new influenza virus causing illness in people. This new virus was first detected in people in the United States in April 2009. This virus is spreading from person to person worldwide, probably in much the same way that regular seasonal influenza viruses spread. In June, the World Health Organization declared the H1N1 swine flu a pandemic, the first such declaration in 41 years. The declaration was made not because the swine flu is particularly dangerous, but because it had become so widespread.

What is an influenza pandemic?

A pandemic is a global disease outbreak. An influenza pandemic occurs when a new “influenza A” virus strain emerges for which there is little or no immunity in humans. It begins to cause serious illness, and then spreads easily person-to-person worldwide. So far, experts report the severity of this pandemic to be “moderate” because most people recover without the need for medical treatment.

How does novel H1N1 virus spread?

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the spread of novel 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, nose or eyes.

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

The symptoms of novel H1N1 flu virus in people include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. A significant number of people who have been infected with this virus also have reported diarrhea and vomiting. Severe illnesses and death has occurred, but fortunately most people generally recover without the need for hospitalization or medical care.

What should I do if I get sick?

If you live in areas where people have been identified with novel H1N1 flu and become ill with influenza-like symptoms, you should stay home and avoid contact with other people. The CDC recommends staying 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.) Stay away from others as much as possible to avoid making them sick. Avoid normal activities, including work, school, travel, shopping, social events, and public gatherings. If you have severe illness or are at high risk for flu complications, contact your healthcare provider or seek medical care. Your healthcare provider will determine whether flu testing or treatment is needed.

If I become ill, what are the warning signs that I need to seek emergency medical care?

In children, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish or gray skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids, lack of urination
- Severe or long-term vomiting
- Unable to wake up or interact
- Irritability and not wanting to be held
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and a worse cough

In adults, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough

Novel H1N1 (Swine Flu) FAQ continued

What can I do to protect myself and my family?

A vaccine to protect against novel H1N1 is expected to be available in the fall. As always, a vaccine will be available to protect against seasonal influenza. The seasonal flu vaccine and novel H1N1 vaccine will be separate. There are everyday actions that can help prevent the spread of germs that cause respiratory illnesses like influenza:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- If you are sick, stay home from work, school, and errands.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing.
- Wash your hands often or use alcohol-based gel hand cleaners.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.
- Have a plan to care for sick family members.
- Stock up on household, health and emergency supplies such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen (Tylenol® or Advil®), tissue and non-perishable foods.

Can the seasonal vaccine and the novel H1N1 vaccine be given at the same time?

It is anticipated that seasonal flu and novel H1N1 vaccines may be administered on the same day. However, the seasonal vaccine is likely to be available earlier than the H1N1 vaccine. The usual seasonal influenza viruses are still expected to cause illness this fall and winter. Experts recommend getting the seasonal flu vaccine as soon as it is available.

Who should NOT get the vaccine?

Some people should not be vaccinated without first consulting a physician. They include:

- people who have a severe allergy to chicken eggs,
- people who have had a severe reaction to an influenza vaccination in the past,
- people who developed Guillian-Barré syndrome (GBS) within six weeks of getting an influenza vaccine previously,
- children less than six months of age (influenza vaccine is not approved for use in this age group), and
- people who have a moderate or severe illness with a fever should wait to get vaccinated until their symptoms lessen.

If you have questions about whether you should get a flu vaccine, consult your healthcare provider.

Will I need a second shot of the novel H1N1 vaccine? If so, why is this necessary?

Yes, it is likely that a booster shot approximately a month after the initial vaccination will be strongly recommended. This may help your body to develop all the antibodies needed to fight the virus.

Who is at higher risk of potentially dangerous complications from the novel H1N1 virus?

The H1N1 flu is striking a much younger population than the seasonal flu. Therefore, the CDC recommends that the vaccine first be given to high risk groups for complications. These include: pregnant women, people who live with or care for children younger than six months old, healthcare workers, people ages six months to 24 years, and people age 25 to 64 who have chronic illnesses or immune problems.

How long will it take for the vaccine to provide protection?

Ten to 14 days after the second dose of novel H1N1 vaccine.

Is the H1N1 vaccine safe?

Yes. The only side effects are those similar to the seasonal flu vaccine. Some people may experience minor fever, aches, pains and soreness at the injection site. You cannot develop the flu from the H1N1 flu shot.

For more information on novel H1N1, visit the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's H1N1 information page at <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/>

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