

Facts:

from the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment



H1N1 Influenza (swine flu): questions and answers

What is novel Influenza A H1N1?

The novel H1N1 (swine flu) virus is a respiratory disease caused by type A influenza viruses. It is a combination of viruses from pigs, birds and humans. People do not normally get swine flu, but human infections can and do happen. Flu viruses may spread from person-to-person, but in the past, transmission of flu viruses from swine was limited and not sustained beyond three people.

Are there human infections with novel Influenza A H1N1 in the U.S.?

In March and April 2009, an outbreak of flu began with reports of many laboratory-confirmed cases of human infection with a novel Influenza A H1N1 virus in multiple states and Mexico. An updated case count of confirmed H1N1 infections in the United States is kept at www.cdc.gov/H1N1flu/. Federal, local and state health agencies are working together on the investigation.

Is this swine flu virus contagious?

CDC has determined that this Influenza A H1N1 virus is contagious and is spreading from human to human. At this time, it not known how easily the virus spreads between people.

What are the signs and symptoms of H1N1 flu in people?

The symptoms of the novel H1N1 flu in people are similar to the symptoms of regular human flu and include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people have reported diarrhea and vomiting associated with H1N1 flu. Like seasonal flu, this novel H1N1 flu may be more serious for those with underlying chronic medical conditions.

How does the novel Influenza A H1N1 flu spread?

Spread of this influenza virus is thought to be happening in the same way that seasonal flu spreads. Flu viruses spread mainly from person to person through coughing or sneezing. Sometimes people may become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose.

How can someone with the flu infect someone else?

Infected people may be able to infect others beginning 1 day before symptoms develop and up to 7 or more days after becoming sick. That means that you may be able to pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick.

What should I do to keep from getting the flu?

First and most important: wash your hands. Try to stay in good general health. Get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids, and eat nutritious food. Try not touch surfaces that may be contaminated with the flu virus. Avoid close contact with people who are sick.

Are there medicines to treat the H1N1 flu?

Yes. CDC recommends the use of oseltamivir (Tamiflu) or zanamivir (Relenza) for the treatment and/or prevention of infection with the novel Influenza A H1N1 virus. Antiviral drugs are prescription medicines 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. For treatment, antiviral drugs work best if started soon after getting sick (within 2 days of symptoms).

How long can an infected person spread H1N1 flu to others?

People with H1N1 influenza virus infection should be considered potentially contagious as long as they are symptomatic and possible for up to 7 days following illness onset. Children, especially younger children, might potentially be contagious for longer periods.

What surfaces are most likely to be sources of contamination?

Germs can be spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose, or mouth. Droplets from a cough or sneeze of an infected person move through the air. Germs can be spread when a person touches respiratory droplets from another person on a surface like a desk and then touches their own eyes, mouth or nose before washing their hands.

How long can viruses live outside the body?

We know that some viruses and bacteria can live 2 hours or longer on surfaces like cafeteria tables, doorknobs, and desks. Frequent handwashing will help you reduce the chance of getting contamination from these common surfaces.

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What can I do to protect myself from getting sick?

There is no vaccine available right now to protect against this particular strain of H1N1 flu. There are everyday actions that can help prevent the spread of germs that cause respiratory illnesses like influenza. 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, especially 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 get sick with influenza, CDC recommends that you stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.

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

If you are sick, limit your contact with other people as much as possible. Do not go to work or school if ill. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing to help protect those around you. Put your used tissue in the waste basket. Cover your cough or sneeze if you do not have a tissue. Then, clean your hands, and do so every time you cough or sneeze.

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

Washing your hands often will help protect you from germs. Wash with soap and water, or clean with alcohol-based hand cleaner. We recommend 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. If using gel, rub your hands until the gel is dry; the alcohol in it kills the germs on your hands.

Additional sources of information

Colorado HELP hotline

1-877-462-2911 (toll-free)
M-F, 11 a.m. – 7 p.m.
S-S, 9 a.m. – 5 p.m.



Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment

www.cdphe.state.co.us/epr
303-692-2030
1-877-518-5608 (toll-free)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

www.cdc.gov/swineflu
www.pandemicflu.gov
1-800-311-3435 (toll-free)

What should I do if I get sick?

If you live in areas where H1N1 influenza cases have been identified and become ill with influenza-like symptoms, including fever, body aches, runny nose, sore throat, nausea, or vomiting or diarrhea, you may want to contact their health care provider, particularly if you are worried about your symptoms. Your health care provider will determine whether influenza testing or treatment is needed.

- If you are sick, you should stay home and avoid contact with other people as much as possible to keep from spreading your illness to others.
- If you become ill and experience any of the following warning signs, seek emergency medical care.
- In children emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:
 - * 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
 - * Symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough
 - * Fever with a rash
- 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

How serious is H1N1 flu infection?

Like seasonal flu, H1N1 flu in humans can vary in severity from mild to severe. Between 2005 until January 2009, 12 human cases of swine flu were detected in the U.S. with no deaths occurring. However, any flu infection can be serious.

Can I get H1N1 influenza from eating or preparing pork?

No. H1N1 influenza viruses of swine origin are not spread by food. You cannot get influenza from eating pork or pork products. Eating properly handled and cooked pork products is safe.

I get my flu shot. Will it protect me from H1N1 Flu?

The currently available seasonal flu vaccine is unlikely to protect you against H1N1 flu as this is a different kind of flu virus.



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