

# Public Health Fact Sheet

## H1N1 (swine) Flu



### What is H1N1 (swine) flu?

H1N1 (referred to as “swine flu” early on) 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, probably in much the same way that regular seasonal influenza viruses spread.

### Who can get H1N1 flu?

H1N1 flu affects all age groups, like seasonal influenza.

### What are the symptoms of H1N1 flu?

Symptoms of H1N1 flu are similar to the symptoms of regular human flu and include:

fever	cough	runny or stuffy nose	chills
headache	sore throat	body aches	fatigue

Some people may also have vomiting and diarrhea.

### How does the flu spread?

Spread of H1N1 flu is thought to be happening in the same way that seasonal flu spreads. Flu viruses are spread mainly from person to person through coughing or sneezing of people with influenza. Sometimes people may become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose.

### How long is a person contagious?

People infected with seasonal and H1N1 flu viruses 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 with those infected with the new H1N1 virus. Studies have shown that the influenza virus can survive on environmental surfaces and can infect a person for 2 to 8 hours after being deposited on the surface.

### Is there a treatment for H1N1 flu?

Yes. CDC recommends the use of *oseltamivir* or *zanamivir* for the treatment and/or prevention of infection with H1N1 flu virus. These 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. During the current pandemic, the priority use for influenza antiviral drugs is to treat severe influenza illness (for example, in hospitalized patients) and people who are sick who have a condition that places them at high risk for serious flu-related complications such as pneumonia and/or respiratory failure.

### What is the difference between a vaccine and an antiviral?

**Vaccines** are usually given to prevent infections. Influenza vaccines are made from either pieces of the killed influenza virus or weakened versions of the live virus that will not lead to disease. When vaccinated, the body's immune system makes antibodies which will fight off infection if exposure to the virus occurs.

**Antivirals** are drugs that can treat people who have already been infected by a virus. They also can be used to prevent infection when given before or shortly after exposure and before illness occurs. A key difference between a vaccine and antiviral drug is that the antiviral drug will prevent infection only when administered within a certain time frame before or after exposure and is effective during the time that the

drug is being taken while a vaccine can be given long before exposure to the virus and can provide protection over a long period of time.

## **How can H1N1 flu be prevented?**

An H1N1 vaccine is being developed and clinically tested right now to protect against the H1N1 virus, and may be ready for the public in the fall. 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 when done.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- If you are sick with flu-like illness, it is recommended 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 you can take:**

- Follow public health advice regarding school dismissals, 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 sanitizer, tissues and other related items could be useful and help avoid the need to make trips out in public while you are sick and contagious.

## **Can a person get H1N1 flu from eating or preparing pork?**

No. H1N1 flu viruses are not spread by food. You cannot get infected with H1N1 virus from eating pork or pork products. Eating properly handled and cooked pork products is safe.

### **Hand washing instructions:**

- Use soap and running water.
- Rub your hands vigorously for 20 seconds.
- Wash all surfaces, including:
  - Backs of hands.
  - Wrists.
  - Between fingers.
  - Under fingernails.
- Rinse well.
- Dry hands with a paper towel.
- Turn off water using a paper towel instead of bare hands.