



PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET

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H1N1 Flu (Swine Flu)

What is H1N1 flu?

H1N1 flu (called “swine flu” early on) is a new strain of flu virus causing illness in people. In April 2009 this specific type of H1N1 flu was first reported in the United States. H1N1 flu has now been found in many other areas of the world.

What are the symptoms of H1N1 flu?

Symptoms are similar to regular flu and include sudden fever, cough, sore throat, muscle aches, headache, chills and general weakness. Some people also have diarrhea and vomiting. These symptoms can range from mild to severe.

How does H1N1 flu spread in people?

The current strain of H1N1 flu is able to spread from one person to another. It is thought to spread the same way as regular flu in that the virus lives in the nose and throat and is sprayed into the air when an infected person sneezes, coughs or talks. People nearby can then breathe in the virus. Sometimes people get flu by touching something with the flu germ on it and then touching their mouth or nose. Symptoms usually start 1 to 3 days after a person breathes in the virus but can take longer.

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

People infected with seasonal and novel H1N1 flu are most likely to infect others from 1 day before getting sick to 4 days after getting sick. The virus can be shed for longer time periods in some people, especially people with weakened immune systems and children.

Is there a vaccine for H1N1 flu?

There is no vaccine available right now to protect against novel H1N1 virus. However, a novel H1N1 vaccine is currently being developed and may be ready for the public in a few months. As always, a vaccine will be available to protect against seasonal influenza this fall. It is recommended that all children from age 6 months through 18 years, the elderly, and those with underlying health problems be vaccinated against seasonal influenza.

What can I do to protect myself against H1N1 flu?

- Clean your hands often with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand cleaner.
- Try to stay in good health by getting plenty of sleep, drink plenty of fluids and eat nutritious food.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick, if possible.

What should I do if I get sick?

If you have or if you get flu symptoms, you should stay home. If you have other health problems, you may wish to contact your healthcare provider. Your healthcare provider can determine if you need treatment and/or a test for influenza. Generally, flu symptoms last 3 to 7 days. Drink plenty of fluids,

rest, and take medicine to reduce your fever. Children ages 18 years and younger should not be given aspirin unless specifically advised to do so by their doctor. Talk to your doctor if symptoms seem severe or ongoing.

Seek emergency medical care if you have any of the following:

Children:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Not waking up or not interacting normally
- Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
- Flu like symptoms that improve and then return with fever and cough
- Fever with a rash

Adults:

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

Can I get H1N1 flu from eating pork?

No, H1N1 flu is not spread through food. Eating properly handled and cooked pork products is safe.

Are there any medications that I can take?

For most people with flu, the most important treatment is rest, fluids, and medicine to control fever. Most people do not need a specific medicine against the virus. Only a health care provider can decide if you or your child should receive the specific medicine against the virus. The priority use for these drugs is to treat people who are seriously ill or who have a medical condition that puts them at high risk of serious flu complications.

If I have the flu, what can I do to stop it from spreading to others?

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue every time you cough or sneeze. Then throw the used tissue in a waste basket. If you don't have a tissue, sneeze or cough into your upper sleeve.
- Clean your hands with soap and water, especially after coughing or sneezing. You can also use alcohol-based hand cleaner.
- Do not go to work or school if sick. Stay home when you are sick. It is recommended that you stay at home for 4 days after you first get sick or for 24 hours after your symptoms have gone away, whichever is longer.
- Try to limit contact with others to keep from getting them sick.

**For more information, please contact
Boston Public Health Commission
Mayor's Health Line
(617) 534-5050 or www.bphc.org**