

H1N1 Flu Information

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. Other countries, including Mexico and Canada, have reported people sick with this new virus. This virus is spreading from person-to-person, probably in much the same way that regular seasonal influenza viruses spread.

Why is this new H1N1 virus sometimes called “swine flu”?

This virus was originally referred to as “swine flu” because laboratory testing showed that many of the genes in this new virus were very similar to influenza viruses that normally occur in pigs in North America. But further study has shown that this new virus is very different from what normally circulates in North American pigs. It has two genes from flu viruses that normally circulate in pigs in Europe and Asia and avian genes and human genes. Scientists call this a “quadruple reassortant” virus.

How severe is illness associated with this new H1N1 virus?

It’s not known at this time how severe this virus will be in the general population. CDC is studying the medical histories of people who have been infected with this virus to determine whether some people may be at greater risk from infection, serious illness or hospitalization from the virus. In seasonal flu, there are certain people that are at higher risk of serious flu-related complications. This includes people 65 years and older, children younger than five years old, pregnant women, and people of any age with chronic medical conditions. It’s unknown at this time whether certain groups of people are at greater risk of serious flu-related complications from infection with this new virus. CDC also is conducting laboratory studies to see if certain people might have natural immunity to this virus, depending on their age.

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

The symptoms of H1N1 (swine) 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 (swine) flu. In the past, severe illness (pneumonia and respiratory failure) and deaths have been reported with H1N1 (swine) flu infection in people. Like seasonal flu, H1N1 (swine) flu may cause a worsening of underlying chronic medical conditions.

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
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Not waking up or not interacting
- Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and 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

How do you catch H1N1 (swine) flu?

Spread of H1N1 (swine) flu can occur in two ways:

- Through contact with infected pigs or environments contaminated with swine flu viruses.
- Through contact with a person with H1N1 (swine) flu. Human-to-human spread of H1N1 (swine) flu has been documented also and is thought to occur in the same way as seasonal flu. Influenza is thought to spread mainly person-to-person through coughing or sneezing of infected people.

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.

What should I do if I get sick?

If you live in areas where people have been identified with new H1N1 flu and become ill with influenza-like symptoms, including fever, body aches, runny or stuffy nose, sore throat, nausea, or vomiting or diarrhea, you should stay home and avoid contact with other people, except to seek medical care. If you have severe illness or you are at high risk for flu complications, contact your health care provider or seek medical care. Your health care provider will determine whether flu testing or treatment is needed.