



PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET

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2009 H1N1 Flu

What is 2009 H1N1 flu?

The 2009 H1N1 flu, known as “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 and has now been found in many other areas of the world. The 2009 H1N1 flu is spread the same way, causes the same symptoms and is treated the same way as seasonal flu. The main difference between seasonal flu and 2009 H1N1 flu is that since this is a new strain of flu most people do not have immunity or protection against 2009 H1N1 flu. Therefore, since few people have protection against 2009 H1N1 flu, more people could become sick with this type of flu.

What are the symptoms of 2009 H1N1 flu?

Symptoms are similar to seasonal 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 2009 H1N1 flu spread in people?

The 2009 H1N1 flu is thought to spread the same way as seasonal flu in that the viruses that cause flu live in the nose and throat and are sprayed into the air when an infected person sneezes or coughs. People nearby can then breathe in the virus. Flu symptoms usually start 1 to 3 days after a person breathes in the virus. An infected person is most contagious 1 day before symptoms begin until 4 days afterward; however, the virus can be shed for longer time periods in some people, especially people with weakened immune systems and children.

Can I get 2009 H1N1 flu from eating pork?

No, 2009 H1N1 flu is not spread through food. Eating properly handled and cooked pork products is safe.

Is there a vaccine for 2009 H1N1 flu?

A vaccine to protect against 2009 H1N1 flu has been approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). It is important to remember that the seasonal flu vaccine will not protect against 2009 H1N1 flu. The 2009 H1N1 flu vaccine is now available in limited supply. More is expected to be available later in the fall. Initial supplies are being offered to those at most risk, including pregnant women, children six months or older, household or other close contacts of infants less than 6 months of age, adults with underlying medical problems, and healthcare or emergency medical workers. Based on information from 2009 H1N1 flu cases to date, the elderly are not considered to be at high risk for 2009 H1N1 flu.

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What should I do if I get sick?

Generally, the flu lasts 3 to 7 days. Drink plenty of fluids and get a lot of rest. Medication such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen can be used to help relieve a fever. Be sure to follow package directions for the age of the person taking the medicine. Do not give aspirin to children due to the risk of Reye's Syndrome, a rare but serious illness. Decongestants may help relieve a stuffy nose or sinus pressure in adults and children over 4 years. Your healthcare provider can determine if you need treatment and/or a test for influenza. Talk to your doctor if symptoms seem severe or ongoing.

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. Antiviral medicines are most often recommended for persons at high risk of developing complications from the flu. Most people do not need antiviral medicine. These medicines must be prescribed by a doctor. These medicines are most effective if started within 48 hours of symptom onset. These drugs can reduce the symptoms of the flu and shorten the time you are sick by 1 to 2 days.

How can I prevent the spread of flu?

- 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.
- Stay home when you are sick. It is recommended that you stay at home for 24 hours after your fever has gone away (without medications to reduce the fever). *For most people, this means staying home for at least four days; returning to public activities before this time may spread infection to others.* Avoid close contact with people who are sick, if possible.

**For more information, please contact
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