

H1N1 FLU FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

PANDEMIC H1N1 FLU

What is the difference between seasonal influenza (flu) and pandemic H1N1 flu?

Influenza (flu) is a respiratory illness caused by flu viruses. Seasonal flu and pandemic H1N1 flu are both flu viruses. Seasonal flu usually causes illness every flu season (fall and winter). In April 2009, a new flu virus (early on called "swine flu") started causing illness in people. In June, 2009 this new flu virus had spread world wide and it was renamed pandemic H1N1 flu. This pandemic H1N1 flu virus continues to spread from person-to-person. Because the pandemic H1N1 virus is new, we have no or little immunity (protection) against it.

Who is getting pandemic H1N1 flu

Like with seasonal flu, anybody who is exposed to pandemic H1N1 flu is at-risk of getting sick. But pandemic H1N1 flu has been spreading most rapidly among young adults and children. The average age of people with pandemic H1N1 flu is about 17 years of age, and the largest numbers of people who have gotten sick are between the ages of 5 and 24 years. Fewer cases have been reported in people older than 64 years of age.

How serious is pandemic H1N1 flu?

Most people sick with pandemic H1N1 flu have had mild illness and have recovered without complications, medical care or antiviral treatment. However, some people are at higher risk of serious complications from pandemic H1N1 flu. They are more likely to need hospitalization and are at higher risk of death. People at-risk for serious complications from H1N1 flu include:

- Children younger than 5 years old, especially children younger than 2 years old;
- Pregnant women;
- People with the following conditions:
 - Younger than 19 years of age who are receiving long-term aspirin therapy;
 - Chronic lung (including asthma), heart (except hypertension), kidney, liver, blood (including sickle cell disease), or metabolic disorders (including diabetes mellitus), or cancer;

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- o Weakened immune systems, including those caused by medications or by HIV;
- o Any condition (e.g., cognitive dysfunction, spinal cord injuries, seizure disorders, or other neuromuscular disorders) that can interfere with breathing or the handling of mucus or that can increase the risk of breathing fluids into the lungs.

How do you catch pandemic H1N1 flu?

Pandemic H1N1 flu is spread in the same way that seasonal flu spreads. Flu viruses are spread from person-to-person when an infected person coughs or sneezes. Sometimes people can get infected by touching something with flu viruses on it, and then touching their mouth or nose.

What are the symptoms of seasonal and pandemic H1N1 flu?

Both seasonal flu and pandemic H1N1 flu can cause mild to severe illness. Flu symptoms usually come on suddenly and typically include fever and cough or sore throat. Other symptoms include runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and extreme tiredness. Many people who have been infected with the H1N1 virus, especially children, also have reported diarrhea and vomiting.

Are there travel restrictions for the pandemic H1N1 flu?

The CDC has not issued any recent travel restrictions. There are no current Travel Health Warnings or Travel Health Precautions because the pandemic H1N1 flu has spread world wide. People may make travel plans as they normally would and should take common sense precautions to protect their health during travel. If you are at high risk for complications from any form of flu, discuss your travel plans with your doctor. If you are sick with flu symptoms, it's recommended that you do not travel.

Fighting the Flu

What can I do now to avoid getting pandemic H1N1 flu?

Until the vaccine is available and you can get your vaccine, take some common sense actions to limit the spread of flu. Wash your hands often, get plenty of rest, and stay away from others who are sick.

Why is it important to get the seasonal flu vaccine right now?

Because seasonal flu and H1N1 flu are both circulating, health officials are expecting there will be a lot of illness from flu this fall. With more people getting sick, doctor's offices could get very busy. The seasonal vaccine is available right now, and by getting your seasonal flu vaccine you won't have to worry about getting into your doctor's office at the height of flu season.

Will the seasonal flu vaccine also protect me against the 2009 H1N1 flu?

No. The regular seasonal flu vaccine will only protect against seasonal flu and not against pandemic H1N1 flu. But, it is still important to get your seasonal flu vaccine, especially if you are at-risk for serious complications of flu. If more people get the vaccine now, it could help reduce the overall impact of flu in our community.

What to Do When Sick

What should I do if I have flu symptoms?

Here are the steps to take to recover from the flu and prevent the spread of flu to others:

- If you are feeling sick and don't have a fever, it's best to stay home from work or school until you feel better.
- If you have a fever of 100° F or higher and cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, absolutely stay home from work or school.
- Contact a doctor right away if -
 - You have an underlying medical condition;
 - Your symptoms get worse;
 - You have trouble breathing; or,
 - You get dehydrated from vomiting and diarrhea.
- Get plenty of rest and drink lots of water and other clear liquids.
- Treat fevers and aches with over-the-counter medicines by following the manufacturer's recommendations. Avoid medications containing aspirin.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue whenever you sneeze or cough. Throw the tissue away in a waste basket. If you do not have a tissue, sneeze or cough into the fold of your elbow, without using your hands.
- Stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone and you are no longer taking medication.
- While you are sick, consider wearing a surgical mask at home if you need to be around others, and wash your hands frequently so that you don't spread the virus to others.
- Do not have visitors in your home while you or another household member is sick.

If I have flu-like symptoms, how or where can I get tested for pandemic H1N1 flu?

Most children and adults with flu symptoms do not need to be tested for the flu, and most people get better on their own without any special medical treatment. People who are at-risk of severe complications should call their health care provider to see if they need to take medications.

What about the use of antivirals (such as TamiFlu) to treat the pandemic H1N1 flu infection?

Antiviral drugs are prescription medicines (pills, liquid or an inhaled powder) that fight 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. This fall, antivirals will be used for people with severe illness or who are at higher risk for flu complications. It is important to remember that most healthy people recover without antiviral treatment. If you have questions, talk to your medical provider about your need for antiviral medication.

About the H1N1 Flu Vaccine

When will the pandemic H1N1 flu vaccine become available?

The pandemic H1N1 flu vaccine will first be available in October. The specific date of arrival depends on the production. The vaccine will be available from health care providers as they receive shipments.

Where can I get the pandemic H1N1 flu vaccine?

The best place to get the pandemic H1N1 flu and seasonal flu vaccine is from your health care provider. Call ahead of time to see if they are offering these vaccines.

Who will get the pandemic H1N1 flu vaccine first?

The people who will be offered the pandemic H1N1 vaccine first are the people who are at higher risk of illness or at higher risk for serious complications. These groups of people are:

1. Pregnant women;
2. People who live with or provide care for infants under 6 months;
3. Healthcare and emergency medical services workers;
4. Children and young adults between the ages of 6 months to 24 years; and
5. Adults between the ages of 25 and 64 years **who have medical conditions** that put them at higher risk for flu-related complications.

How many doses of the pandemic H1N1 flu vaccine do I need?

Testing is still being done to determine whether you will need one or two doses of pandemic H1N1 flu vaccine. Children under 10 years of age will need two doses of pandemic H1N1 flu vaccine.

Can the seasonal flu vaccine and the pandemic H1N1 flu vaccine be given at the same time?

Yes, some types of the seasonal flu and H1N1 vaccines may be given on the same day.

Will the new pandemic H1N1 flu vaccine be safe?

The CDC is working very closely with the vaccine manufacturers to develop a safe and effective vaccine. A number of tests have been done in the different at-risk groups to make sure the vaccine is safe before it's released to the public. Vaccines are one of the most powerful ways to prevent people from getting sick and dying of flu. In general, flu vaccines have been found to be safe and effective.

How safe is the pandemic H1N1 flu vaccine for pregnant women?

Flu vaccines have not been shown to cause harm to a pregnant woman or her baby. The seasonal flu shot (injection) is proven safe and already recommended for pregnant women. The 2009 H1N1 flu vaccine will be made in the same way that seasonal flu vaccines are made. Studies are being conducted by the National Institutes of Allergies and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) in pregnant women specifically to make sure it is safe.

What if I am allergic to eggs, can I still get the pandemic H1N1 flu vaccine?

No. Eggs are used to make flu vaccines, so if you have a severe allergy to eggs, you should not get either the seasonal flu or the H1N1 flu vaccine. There are other ways to limit the risk of getting the flu. Follow good health habits like washing your hands often, staying away from others who are sick, getting lots of rest, and staying healthy.

Do people who were previously vaccinated against the 1976 swine flu need to get vaccinated against the 2009 pandemic H1N1 flu?

Yes. The 1976 swine flu virus and the pandemic H1N1 flu virus are different enough that a person vaccinated in 1976 will have not have protection from the 2009 pandemic H1N1 flu.

Will people be required to receive the pandemic H1N1 flu vaccine?

No. Vaccination is not required for anyone. However, vaccines offer the best protection against flu for yourself and the whole community.

What if I already had and recovered from the pandemic H1N1 flu, do I still need to get a H1N1 vaccine?

People recommended for the 2009 H1N1 flu vaccine should get it, even if they have had a flu-like illness previously. If you had the flu

early on (when community testing was still happening) and a laboratory test confirmed you had the H1N1 virus, the CDC recommends that anyone who was tested for 2009 H1N1 flu - discuss this issue with their health care provider. Your health provider can determine if the test truly confirmed H1N1.

What if I don't want to get a flu vaccine or can't - how can I prevent the spread of flu?

It is important to take everyday actions to stay healthy.

- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol based hand cleaners with at least 60% alcohol are also effective.
- Keep common areas clean, like kitchen counters, bathrooms, door handles, toys, telephones, and other household items.
- Allow fresh air to flow into your home or at work by opening screened windows and doors.
- Each morning, check all family members, especially school age children, for flu-like symptoms.
- Follow public health advice regarding school closures and other social distancing measures.

Questions?

If you have questions about flu or about this information, you may call the Public Health Disease Prevention and Control Program at 408-885-4214 and ask to speak with a public health nurse.

