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Common Concerns by Chris Petersen



UPDATED FACTS ABOUT THE H1N1 AND THE SEASONAL FLU (INFLUENZA)

What is Influenza and H1N1?

Influenza is a viral infection that attacks your respiratory system, including your nose, throat, bronchial tubes and lungs. If you're generally healthy and you catch influenza –commonly called the flu–you're likely to feel rotten for a few days, but you probably won't develop complications or need hospital care. If you have a weakened immune system or chronic illness, though, influenza can be fatal. If you fit that category of people you should contact your providers office.

Novel H1N1 flu or swine flu is a respiratory infection caused by a specific Influenza A virus. The outbreak of what is popularly called swine flu involves a new H1N1 type A influenza strain that's a genetic combination of swine, avian and human influenza viruses. It can spread from human to human.

Influenza is unpredictable, but this flu season could be worse than recent years because of the H1N1 virus. CDC is preparing for a busy flu season and expects both H1N1 flu and seasonal flu to cause illness, hospital stays and deaths this season.

Flu symptoms are:

- Fever
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Body aches
- Headache
- Chills
- Fatigue
- Sometimes diarrhea
- Sometimes vomiting

How does H1N1 Flu spread?

Both H1N1 flu and seasonal influenza are thought to spread mostly from person to person through the coughs and sneezes of people who are sick with influenza. People also may get sick by touching something with flu viruses on it, and then touching their mouth or nose.

How long can a sick person spread H1N1 flu to others?

People infected with H1N1 flu shed virus and may be able to infect others from 1 day before getting sick to about 7 days after getting sick. This can be longer in some people, especially children and people with weakened immune systems.

Who is at greatest risk of infection with this new virus?

So far, younger people have been more likely to be infected with H1N1 flu than older people. Most cases of H1N1 have occurred in people younger than 25 years of age. At this time, there are relatively few cases of H1N1 in people 65 or older, which is unusual when compared with seasonal flu. However, we still expect the seasonal flu to cause illness in people 65 or older.

What can I do to protect myself from getting sick from influenza and H1N1 flu?

CDC recommends a three-step approach to fighting the flu:

- Vaccination
- Everyday preventive actions including frequent hand washing and staying home when sick
- The correct use of antiviral drugs if your doctor recommends them

A vaccine against H1N1 flu has been produced. To protect those at greatest risk of H1N1, CDC recommends that certain people get the H1N1 flu vaccine first when it becomes available. These key groups include people who are at high risk of getting sick or having serious flu complications. These groups include;

- Pregnant women
- People who live with or provide care for children younger than 6 mos of age
- Health care and emergency medical service personnel
- People 6 months to 24 years of age
- People 25 to 64 years of age who are at higher risk for H1N1 flu complications because of an underlying health condition or compromised immune systems

Everyday actions can help prevent the spread of germs that cause respiratory illnesses like influenza:

- Cover your nose and cough or sneeze into your elbow, if you do use a tissue please discard after each use
- Wash your hands often with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand gel/rub
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth-germs spread this way
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people
- Stay at home if you are sick
- Follow public health advice regarding school closures, avoiding crowds and other social distancing measures

If you become ill with influenza-like symptoms this flu season you should **stay home** and avoid contact with other people except to seek medical care. Most people have been able to recover at home from H1N1 without needing medical care and the same is true of the seasonal flu.

UPDATE:

We are still awaiting the shipment for our seasonal flu vaccine and our H1N1 vaccine to give to the general public. There is still plenty of time to receive your seasonal flu shot-the seasonal flu usually hits hard in January. Most of what we are seeing right now is related to the H1N1 illness. Francis-can skemp has a Influenza Hotline which you can access for information regarding your symptoms or directions on whether you need to seek medical attention that phone number is **608-392-6800**