



# **Novel H1N1 Flu**

## **Frequently Asked Questions**



### **What is novel H1N1 flu?**

Novel H1N1 flu is a respiratory disease similar to seasonal flu, but caused by a new (novel) virus. This new virus was first detected in the U.S. in April 2009. In some people, H1N1 illness is quite severe and can lead to hospitalization or even death. However, most people recover without requiring medical treatment.

### **What is the difference between novel H1N1 flu and swine flu?**

There is no difference. The virus was first called "swine flu" because many of the genes in this new virus were similar to genes found in flu viruses that occur in pigs (swine). Researchers have since determined that the virus contains genes from human, swine, and avian (bird) influenza viruses. Whether it is called novel H1N1 flu, swine flu, or novel influenza A, it is all caused by the same virus.

### **I've heard talk about a flu pandemic. What is that?**

The World Health Organization (WHO) declared an H1N1 flu pandemic in June 2009. A "pandemic" means that a new virus, such as the novel H1N1 virus, has been detected in many countries around the world and is spreading easily from person to person.

### **How does the novel H1N1 virus spread?**

Novel H1N1 virus is believed to spread in the same way that seasonal flu virus spreads. Flu viruses are mainly passed from person to person through coughing or sneezing. Sometimes, people can become infected by touching something – such as a surface or object – with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose.

### **What are the signs and symptoms of novel H1N1 flu in people?**

The symptoms of novel H1N1 flu in people include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills, and fatigue. A significant number of people who have been infected with this virus also have reported diarrhea and vomiting. Severe illnesses and deaths have occurred as a result of illness associated with this virus.

### **How long can an infected person spread this virus to others?**

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

### **Is there a vaccine for novel H1N1 flu?**

Manufacturers are working on a vaccine for novel H1N1 flu. It is expected to be available in October 2009. In the meantime, CDC recommends everyone get a seasonal flu shot.

### **Are there medicines to treat novel H1N1 flu?**

Yes. CDC recommends the use of the antiviral drugs oseltamivir (Tamiflu®) or zanamivir (Relenza®) for treatment and/or prevention of infection. Antiviral drugs are prescription medicines that fight against 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. For treatment, antiviral drugs work best if started soon after getting sick (within two days of symptoms).

### **What can I do to protect myself from getting sick?**

There are actions that everyone can take to help prevent the spread of germs that cause respiratory illnesses like Novel H1N1 flu.

- Cover your nose and mouth with a disposable tissue when you cough or sneeze. If a tissue isn't available, sneeze or cough into the crook of your elbow.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- If you get sick with flu-like illness, stay home from work or school for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone. Also, limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.
- Clean common surfaces such as doorknobs, phones, faucets, and shopping cart handles.

### **Are there other actions I can take?**

Yes. One of the most important things you can do to prepare for any type of emergency, not just a pandemic, is to create an emergency kit. This kit should contain items such as bottled water, non-perishable food, a battery-operated radio, flashlight, a first-aid kit, and any other supplies you or your family might need in an emergency. (To learn more about creating an emergency kit, visit [www.dhss.mo.gov/Ready\\_in\\_3](http://www.dhss.mo.gov/Ready_in_3).) You should also stay up-to-date on the latest information by checking the news media or monitoring the Internet.

### **Can I get novel H1N1 flu from eating or preparing pork?**

No. Influenza viruses are not spread by food. You cannot get novel H1N1 flu from eating pork or pork products. Eating properly handled and cooked pork products is safe.

### **For More Information**

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu](http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu)

St. Charles County Department of Community Health and the Environment  
[www.scchealth.org/swineflu](http://www.scchealth.org/swineflu) (636) 949-7400 [health@sccmo.org](mailto:health@sccmo.org)