



## JEFFERSON COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

405 MAIN STREET

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### **Novel Influenza A H1N1 Virus (Swine Flu): What Parents Need to Know**

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*Parents with children in schools and in childcare settings may have concerns about the spread of novel H1N1 influenza. The Jefferson County Health Department has developed the following "Questions and Answers" to assist in addressing these concerns:*

#### **What is novel H1N1 influenza?**

Novel H1N1 (also known as "swine flu") is a new influenza virus causing illness in people. This new virus was first detected in people in the United States in April 2009. This virus is spreading from person-to-person worldwide, probably in much the same way that regular seasonal influenza viruses spread. On June 11, 2009, the World Health Organization (WHO) signaled that a pandemic of novel H1N1 influenza was underway.

#### **How is novel H1N1 influenza different from the seasonal influenza that circulates yearly?**

With seasonal influenza, we know that seasons vary in terms of timing, duration and severity. Seasonal influenza can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death. Each year, in the United States, on average 36,000 people die from influenza-related complications and more than 200,000 people are hospitalized from influenza-related causes. Of those hospitalized, 20,000 are children younger than 5 years old. Over 90% of deaths and about 60 percent of hospitalization occur in people older than 65.

When the novel H1N1 outbreak was first detected, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) began working with states to collect, compile and analyze information regarding the novel H1N1 influenza outbreak. The information analyzed by CDC indicates that novel H1N1 influenza has caused greater disease burden in people younger than 25 years of age than older people. At this time, there are few cases and few deaths reported in people older than 64 years old, which is unusual when compared with seasonal influenza. However, pregnancy and other previously recognized high risk medical conditions from seasonal influenza appear to be associated with increased risk of complications from this novel H1N1. These underlying conditions include asthma, diabetes, suppressed immune systems, heart disease, kidney disease, neurocognitive and neuromuscular disorders and pregnancy.

#### **What are the symptoms of novel H1N1 influenza?**

The symptoms of novel H1N1 influenza virus 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.

#### **How is novel H1N1 influenza spread?**

Novel H1N1 and other influenza viruses are thought to be spread from person to person in respiratory droplets of coughs and sneezes. This can happen when droplets from a cough or sneeze of an infected person are propelled through the air and deposited on the mouth or nose of people nearby. Influenza viruses may also be spread when a person touches respiratory droplets on another person or an object and then touches their own mouth or nose (or someone else's mouth or nose) before washing their hands.

#### **When should I keep my child home from school or childcare settings?**

Children with influenza-like illness (fever with a cough or sore throat) should stay home from school or child care and keep away from others as much as possible.

#### **How long should I keep my child home from school or childcare settings?**

Your child should stay home and not attend school or go out into the community (unless it is to access medical care or other necessities) for at least 24 hours after your child's fever is gone (without the use of fever-reducing medications).

#### **Should I take my child to a healthcare provider?**



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If the symptoms are severe, contact your healthcare provider for instruction and advice. Make sure to tell the healthcare provider about the symptoms your child has, including the temperature and how long he or she has had the symptoms.

### **If my child is ill with novel H1N1 influenza, are they at greater risk of complications?**

Limited information is available about how this novel influenza H1N1 virus circulating in people may affect children. However, seasonal influenza and past pandemics, it is known that children, especially those younger than 5 years of age and individuals of any age who have high risk medical conditions (such as asthma, diabetes, suppressed immune systems, heart disease, kidney disease, neurocognitive and neuromuscular disorders and pregnancy) are at increased risk of influenza-related complications. Complications can include pneumonia, bronchitis, and sinus and ear infections. Among children less than 5 years, the risk for severe complications from seasonal influenza is highest among children less than 2 years old. Severe complications may require hospitalization and can even include death.

### **What should I do to care for my child at home?**

- DO NOT GIVE ASPIRIN or products containing aspirin. Consult your healthcare provider for approved medications to use with children.
- Give clear liquids frequently to prevent dehydration.
- Make your child as comfortable as possible.
- Provide “fun” activities appropriate to their age such as coloring books, video/computer games, puzzles, etc.
- Discourage visits from classmates and friends.
- Keep the sick child away from other children in the family to prevent the spread of the virus among family members.

### **How do I protect my child from getting novel H1N1 influenza?**

- Wash hands often with soap and water. Always wash after coughing or sneezing. If soap and water are not nearby, use an alcohol-based hand gel.
- Teach your child to cover coughs and sneezes with their elbow or a tissue NOT HANDS. Promptly throw away used tissues.
- Do not touch eyes, nose, or mouth. Germs can spread this way.
- Stay away from people who are sick.
- Get your child vaccinated.

### **When the vaccine becomes available, how will it be distributed?**

The CDC has recommended that vaccine should be first given to the following populations:

- Students and staff (all ages) associated with schools (K-12) and children (age greater than or equal to 6 months) and staff (all ages) in child care centers
- Pregnant women
- Children 6 months to 4 years
- Household contacts of children less than 6 months of age
- Non-elderly adults (aged greater than 65 years) with medical conditions that increase risk of influenza
- Health care workers and emergency services personnel

State and local health departments are in the process of developing vaccine distribution plans that will target these priority groups.

*For questions or information about H1N1 Influenza, please visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/> or call the Jefferson County Health Department at (636) 282-1010.*