

H1N1: What you need to know

As you have most likely heard, H1N1 (sometimes referred to as “swine flu”) is a new influenza virus causing illness in people. Flu viruses, including H1N1, are spread mainly from person to person through coughing or sneezing by people with the flu. Sometimes people may become infected by touching something – such as a surface or object – with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose.

Unfortunately, the likelihood of contracting H1N1 increases dramatically if you are in a “high-risk group”. These include persons aged 5 or under and 65 or older, pregnant women, people with certain chronic medical conditions such as cancer; diabetes; blood, kidney, liver neurological, or neuromuscular disorders; heart or chronic lung disease, and those with weakened immune systems. **Persons in these “high risk” groups are encouraged to receive immunization for both the seasonal flu and the H1N1 flu.** Consult your doctor for further advice.

The symptoms of the H1N1 flu virus in people include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people may have vomiting and diarrhea. While most people who have been sick have recovered without needing medical treatment, hospitalizations and deaths from infection with the virus have occurred. If you suspect you may have been exposed to or contracted H1N1, contact your doctor immediately for advice and treatment.

As far as preventative measures are concerned, there are easy steps that the Center for Disease Control (CDC) recommends to protect against contracting or further spreading the illness:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it
- Wash your hands often with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- If you are sick with flu-like illness, the **CDC recommends that you stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone** except to get medical care or for other necessities. (Your fever should be gone without the use of a fever-reducing medicine.) Keep away from others as much as possible to keep from making others sick.

For more information contact your medical provider, and for the most up-to-date information visit the Center for Disease Control’s website at www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu.

