



Questions & Answers

What is H1N1?

H1N1 virus, also known as swine flu, is a recently detected illness in humans. Persons with H1N1 have symptoms similar to those caused by seasonal flu.

This virus has been referred to as swine flu because laboratory testing showed that many of the genes in this new virus were very similar to flu viruses that normally occur in pigs. However, further study has shown that it is very different from those viruses. It has two genes from flu viruses that normally circulate in pigs, but it also has genes from flu viruses that normally circulate in birds and other genes from flu that normally afflicts humans.

This new virus was first detected in people in the United States in April 2009. The virus has infected people throughout the world. For an update, visit: <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/>.

Are there human infections with the H1N1 virus in Missouri?

Yes. For an update, visit: http://www.dhss.mo.gov/BT_Response/_H1N1Flu.html.

Is H1N1 contagious?

The H1N1 virus is contagious and spreads easily from person to person.

What are the signs and symptoms of H1N1 in people?

The symptoms of H1N1 in people are similar to the symptoms of the seasonal flu. They include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people who have been infected with the H1N1 virus, especially children, also have reported diarrhea and vomiting. Like seasonal flu, H1N1 may cause a worsening of underlying chronic medical conditions. Possible complications include pneumonia and difficulty breathing.

How do you catch the H1N1 virus?

The H1N1 virus spreads the same way that seasonal flu spreads. Flu viruses move mainly from person to person through coughing or sneezing by people who have the illness. People also can become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their eyes, mouth or nose.

Is there a vaccine or medicine to treat H1N1?

A vaccine against the new H1N1 flu is being produced and is expected to be widely available in mid-October. People who are at the highest risk of severe H1N1 illness, such as pregnant women, the young, and those with underlying health conditions like heart and lung disease, will receive the new vaccine first.

Until then, two antiviral drugs appear to be effective in treating symptoms of the H1N1 virus. The first is Oseltamivir, which is sold under the trade name Tamiflu®. The second is Zanamivir, sold under the trade name Relenza®. A person's health care provider can determine whether specific treatment is necessary. These prescription medicines fight the flu by keeping flu viruses from reproducing in a person's body. They work best when started within two days of the onset of symptoms. They can make the illness milder and make the person feel better faster. They may also prevent serious flu complications.

How long can an infected person spread H1N1 influenza to others?

It is currently believed that persons with the H1N1 virus may be contagious from one day before they develop symptoms until up to seven days after they get sick. Children, especially younger children, and people with weakened immune systems might be contagious for longer periods.

People with influenza-like illness should remain at home until at least 24 hours after they are free of 100-degree fever without the use of medications. This recommendation is a change from the previous recommendation that ill persons stay home for seven days after illness onset or until 24 hours after the resolution of symptoms, whichever was longer.

What can I do to protect myself from getting sick?

Everyday actions can help prevent the spread of germs that cause respiratory illnesses like influenza. Take these steps to protect your health:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective if soap and water are not available.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it. If no tissue is available, cough or sneeze into your sleeve.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- If you get the flu, stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.

What should I do if I get sick?

If you become ill with flu-like symptoms, including fever, body aches, runny or stuffy nose, sore throat, nausea, or vomiting or diarrhea, you should stay home and avoid contact with other people except to seek medical care.

If you have severe illness or you are at high risk for flu complications, contact your health care provider or seek medical care. Your health care provider will determine whether flu testing or treatment is needed.

If you become ill and experience any of the following warning signs, seek emergency medical care.

In children, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish or gray skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Not waking up or not interacting
- Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
- Flu-like symptoms improve, but then return with fever and worse cough
- Fever with a rash

In adults, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough

When the H1N1 influenza vaccine becomes available, who will receive the vaccine first?

Five groups were identified as being at high risk for health complications from H1N1, or as being most likely to come in contact with the H1N1 virus. They are:

- pregnant women;
- people who live with or provide care for infants younger than age six months, including parents, siblings and day care providers;
- ; health care and emergency medical services personnel;
- children and young adults ages six months through 24 years;
- people ages 25 through 64 years who have medical conditions that put them at higher risk for influenza- related complications.

How many doses of the H1N1 vaccine are required?

One dose of H1N1 flu vaccine is required for persons 10 years of age and older.

Children younger than 10 are recommended to receive two doses of the H1N1 vaccine. The vaccine should be separated by 4 week intervals. Infants younger than 6 months of age are not recommended to receive the H1N1 vaccine or seasonal flu vaccine.

Will the seasonal flu vaccine also protect against H1N1 influenza?

The seasonal flu vaccine is not expected to protect against H1N1 flu. Likewise, the H1N1 flu vaccine will not protect against seasonal influenza.

Where do I go to get vaccinated?

H1N1 vaccine will be available through local public health agencies and other designated sites.

Contact your local public health agency for information about the vaccine and its local availability. A directory is available at: <http://www.dhss.mo.gov/LPHA/LPHAs.html>

Why are pregnant women prioritized for vaccination?

Pregnant women account for an unusually high number of serious flu-related complications and a significant number have died. Therefore, pregnant women are a high-priority group for vaccination.

Pregnant women with suspected or confirmed influenza should be treated with antiviral drugs as early as possible. These medications can be taken during any trimester of pregnancy.

Why are healthy senior adults not included as a priority group for the 2009 H1N1 vaccination as they are for seasonal influenza vaccine?

Persons age 65 years and older are thought to have some degree of preexisting immunity to the H1N1 strains through previous exposure to a similar virus, either through infection or vaccination.

People age 65 years and older are included as a priority group if they live with or care for infants younger than age six months or are a health care or emergency-services provider.

If a family member is at home sick with H1N1 flu, should other family members who are healthy stay home as well?

Family members who are well, but who have an ill family member at home with the H1N1 virus, can go to work or school as usual. These family members should monitor their health every day, and take basic precautions including washing their hands often with soap and water, especially after coughing or sneezing. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective. If a person becomes ill, they should stay home.

Anyone who has an underlying medical condition or is pregnant should call their health care provider for advice. Influenza antiviral drugs may be needed to prevent illness.

Can I get H1N1 (swine flu) from eating or preparing pork?

No. The H1N1 virus is not spread by food. You cannot get it from eating pork or pork products. Eating properly handled and cooked pork products is safe.

How can I gain additional information?

To learn more about the H1N1 virus, visit Missouri's H1N1 Web site, http://www.dhss.mo.gov/BT_Response/H1N1Flu.html and see the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention fact sheet titled "H1N1 Flu (Swine Flu) and You," at: <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/qa.htm>.

For updated information, visit http://www.dhss.mo.gov/BT_Response/H1N1Flu.html.

For additional background on the current flu pandemic, go to the H1N1 virus briefing at: http://www.dhss.mo.gov/BT_Response/SwineFlu/Swine_Flu_Briefing.pdf.