

Preparing for the H1N1 Flu Virus

The H1N1 virus, also known as Swine Flu, has been a common topic in the news lately due to the outbreak in early 2009. School has begun and winter is on its way, which means flu shots. This year, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) are recommending a series of 2 shots in order to protect oneself against the H1N1 virus.

What Is H1N1?

H1N1 is a flu virus infection that can cause many symptoms, including a temperature of 100 degrees and higher, fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people have also had diarrhea and vomiting associated with H1N1 flu. Similar to the seasonal flu, H1N1 flu in humans can vary in harshness from mild to severe.

On the "severe" end of the spectrum, with H1N1 there is a potential for pneumonia, respiratory failure and even death. Certain groups might be more likely to develop a severe illness from H1N1 flu infection, such as pregnant women and persons with chronic medical conditions. Sometimes bacterial infections may occur at the same time as or after infection with influenza viruses and lead to pneumonias, ear infections, or sinus infections.

How Does the Virus Spread?

Just like any other influenza virus, H1N1 spreads from person to person through touch and the spread of germs through respiratory droplets (which come from coughs and sneezes). If the droplets touch another person somehow, their chance of obtaining the virus becomes increased. This is why covering your mouth, washing your hands, and avoiding touching your mouth or eyes is so important.

Avoid Spreading the Virus

Once you have been diagnosed with the virus, your physician will prescribe the appropriate care while also requiring that you stay at home to prevent further spreading among the population. Once you are at home, you should be very careful and follow these instructions:

- Keep away from others as much as possible. Stay home and, while there, avoid close contact with roommates and family members.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Drink clear fluids such as water, broth, electrolyte beverages for infants, and sports drinks to keep from being dehydrated.
- Cover your coughs and sneezes as carefully as possible. Always wash your hands with soap and warm water or use anti-bacterial hand sanitizer. Make sure the areas you come into contact with are sanitized so all germs are destroyed before they can be spread to others.
- Although this may seem difficult, wear a facemask. Your family and roommates will appreciate this because it will decrease their chances of catching the H1N1 virus.
- Be sure to stay home at least 24 hours after your fever is gone except for medical necessities.



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Advice for Caretakers

- Designate a person who is not at high risk of influenza as the main caretaker of household members who are sick.
- Always wear a facemask around sick people in the house.
- Clean your hands after being in contact with the virus (in other words, after handling dishes, tissues, laundry, etc., used by the ill persons in the house).
- Talk to your healthcare provider about antiviral medication to prevent your illness.
- Avoid face-to-face contact as much as possible.
- Do not allow visitors. Phone calls are much safer.
- Use paper towels or dedicate cloth towels to each person in the household for drying hands after hand washing. For example, have different colored towels for each person.

Who Needs the Vaccine?

The CDC's Advisory Committee has recommended that certain groups receive the H1N1 vaccine as soon as possible. These groups include:

- Pregnant women.
- Caretakers for children younger than 6 months of age.
- Healthcare and emergency medical services personnel.
- People who are between the ages of 6 months and 24 years.
- People ages 25-64 who are at higher risk due to chronic health disorders.

The H1N1 virus is very treatable and does not call for panic. The appropriate precautions are being taken by our government, and local healthcare facilities. The vaccine should not experience a shortage in 2009, but the demand may be overwhelming. If the vaccine is initially limited, certain groups will receive the vaccine before others such as pregnant women, care takers for infants, healthcare workers, children ages 6 months to 4 years, and children ages 5 through age 18 with chronic illnesses. Current studies indicate the risk for infection among persons age 65 or older is less than the risk for younger age groups. Therefore, as vaccine supply and demand for vaccine among younger age groups is being met, programs and providers will offer vaccination to people over the age of 65.

For more information on the H1N1 (swine flu) virus, please visit:

<http://www.webmd.com/cold-and-flu/flu-guide/swine-flu-faq-1>

<http://www.cdc.gov/H1N1FLU/>

http://www.medicinenet.com/swine_flu/article.htm