



# Your Health Advocacy and Information Newsletter

The 2009 H1N1 Influenza Virus

October, 2009

With the new H1N1 virus continuing to cause illness, hospitalizations and deaths in the U.S. during the normally flu-free summer months and some uncertainty about what the upcoming flu season might bring, The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has taken an important step in preparations for a voluntary 2009 H1N1 vaccination. Every flu season has the potential to cause illness, doctor's visits, hospitalizations and deaths. The CDC is concerned that the new H1N1 flu virus could result in a particularly severe 2009-2010 flu season.

## What is the 2009 H1N1 Virus?

The 2009 H1N1 virus (referred to as "swine flu" early on) is a new influenza virus causing illness in people. It 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 the 2009 H1N1 flu was underway. The virus was originally referred to as "swine flu" because laboratory testing showed that many of the genes in this new virus were very similar to influenza viruses that normally occur in pigs (swine) in North America. But further study has shown that this new virus is very different from what normally circulates in North American pigs. It has two genes from flu viruses that normally circulate in pigs in Europe and Asia and bird (avian) genes and human genes. Scientists call this a "quadruple reassortant" virus.



## How does the 2009 H1N1 virus spread?

The spread of the 2009 H1N1 virus is thought to occur in the same way that seasonal flu spreads. Flu viruses are spread mainly from person to person through coughing or sneezing by people with influenza. Sometimes people may become infected by touching a surface or object with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose.

## What are the signs and symptoms of this virus in people?

The symptoms of the 2009 H1N1 flu virus include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people may have vomiting and diarrhea.

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

People infected with the 2009 H1N1 flu virus may be able to infect others from 1 day prior to getting sick to 5 to 7 days after.

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

A 2009 H1N1 vaccine is currently in production and should be ready for the public this fall. As always, a vaccine will be available to protect against regular seasonal influenza. There are everyday actions that can help prevent the spread of germs that cause respiratory illnesses like influenza:

- 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.



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- 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 avoid spreading the virus.
- Persons aged 25 through 64 years who have health conditions associated with higher risk of medical complications from influenza including heart or lung disease (asthma, COPD, emphysema), diabetes, suppressed or weakened immune systems, kidney disease, and neuromuscular and neurocognitive disorders.

### Is there medicine available to treat the 2009 H1N1 virus?

There are prescription antiviral drugs that fight against the flu by keeping the flu from reproducing in your body. The CDC recommends the use of oseltamivir (Tamiflu) or zanamivir (Relenza) for treatment and/or prevention of infection. These medications may also prevent serious flu complications. Persons at risk for flu complications should talk to their health care provider about antivirals.

Vaccines are the best tool we have to prevent influenza. The CDC hopes that people will start to go out and get vaccinated against seasonal influenza as soon as vaccines become available at their doctor's offices and in their communities. The seasonal flu vaccine is unlikely to provide protection against the 2009 H1N1 influenza. However the 2009 H1N1 vaccine is currently in production. The 2009 H1N1 vaccine is not intended to replace the seasonal flu vaccine – it is intended to be used in addition to the seasonal flu vaccine.

### The groups recommended to receive the 2009 H1N1 influenza vaccine include:

- Pregnant women because they are at higher risk of complications and can potentially provide protection to infants who cannot be vaccinated;
- Household contacts and caregivers for children younger than 6 months of age because younger infants are at higher risk of influenza-related complications and cannot be vaccinated. Vaccination of those in close contact with infants younger than 6 months old might help protect infants by “cocooning” them from the virus;
- Healthcare and emergency medical services personnel because infections among healthcare workers have been reported and this can be a potential source of infection for vulnerable patients. Also, increased absenteeism in this population could reduce healthcare system capacity;
- All people from 6 months through 24 years of age

No shortage of the 2009 H1N1 vaccine is expected, but vaccine availability and demand can be unpredictable and there is some possibility that initially, the vaccine will be available in limited quantities. So, the CDC made recommendations regarding which people within the groups listed above should be prioritized if the vaccine is initially available in extremely limited quantities. For more information see the CDC press release [CDC Advisors Make Recommendations for Use of Vaccine Against the 2009 H1N1](#).

Once the demand for the vaccine for the prioritized groups has been met at the local level, programs and providers should also begin vaccinating everyone from the age of 25 through 64. Current studies indicate that the risk for infection among persons age 65 or older is less than the risk for younger age groups.

### Seasonal Flu Shot Locations:

take care clinics (inside of select Walgreens):

- Seasonal flu shots for \$24.99
- Available for adults and children ages 2+
- Open 7 days a week and weeknights too
- No appointments necessary
- Most insurance accepted

Aurora Quickcare clinics (inside Wal-Mart stores):

- Prices of vaccines vary
- Patients must be 6 months or older to be treated; 9 years or older to receive vaccines
- No appointment necessary

