



Facts about Seasonal Influenza & New H1N1 (swine) Influenza

What is influenza?

Influenza is a viral infection that typically affects 5 to 20 percent of the population in late fall and early winter. There are different types of influenza virus present in the environment every year that, in general, are collectively called seasonal flu. Recently, a new strain of influenza virus was detected. It is called H1N1 influenza, or swine flu. It started in pigs but is now affecting humans. It appears that people, especially young children and adults, do not have immunity to the H1N1 virus, which can cause more people to get sick from the virus. H1N1 influenza is now classified as a pandemic, meaning that it is occurring in many parts of the world at the same time.



How are seasonal influenza and H1N1 influenza similar?

Seasonal influenza and H1N1 influenza are spread the same way.

All flu viruses spread through droplets made when someone with the flu coughs or sneezes into the air. A person can get the flu by breathing in these droplets or touching his or her eyes, nose, or mouth after touching a surface that has the flu virus droplets on it. When you first catch the virus, you may not feel sick, but you may be able to pass the virus to someone else. Once you have symptoms, you can spread the virus until at least 24 hours after your fever is gone.

The signs and symptoms of seasonal flu and H1N1 flu are similar.

People with either type of influenza may have a headache, fever, dry cough, sore throat, runny/stuffy nose, extreme tiredness, and muscle aches. Children may also have nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea with seasonal influenza. In the case of H1N1, both children and adults may also experience vomiting and diarrhea. Most people who get influenza recover within 2 weeks of getting sick, but some people can develop serious complications (such as pneumonia) as a result of any flu virus.

Some groups of people are at increased risk for serious health conditions from seasonal flu and H1N1 flu.

Groups at high risk for serious complications (such as pneumonia) with seasonal influenza are young children, pregnant women, the elderly and people with certain health conditions, such as asthma, diabetes, or heart disease. The same groups of people are at risk for complications with H1N1.

Antiviral drugs may be used for treating both seasonal and H1N1 influenza.

Drugs used to treat both seasonal flu and H1N1 are called antivirals. Antiviral drugs are prescription medicines that fight against the flu by keeping flu viruses from reproducing in your body. If you get sick, antiviral drugs can make your illness milder and may make you feel better faster. They may also help prevent serious flu complications. Unfortunately, some influenza viruses can develop a resistance to antiviral drugs over time, making them less effective. Your health care practitioner can decide if an antiviral drug is right for you. Other drugs, such as acetaminophen and ibuprofen help treat the symptoms of flu. Talk to your health care practitioner to find out what drugs you should take if you have symptoms of the flu.

You can protect yourself and others from all kinds of influenza by practicing healthy habits.

- Wash your hands often.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you sneeze or cough. After coughing or sneezing, put the tissue in the trash. If you do not have a tissue, cover your mouth and nose with your upper arm. Wash your hands after you cough or sneeze.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Stay at home when you are sick.
- Avoid close contact with people who have the flu.
- Do not share eating utensils or dishes with an infected person.
- Eat right, exercise regularly, and get enough sleep.

Protect your home from contamination from all kinds of influenza using the same method.

The flu is able to live on a surface for up eight hours. It can spread when a person touches an object contaminated with the flu virus and then touches his or her eyes, nose, or mouth. Surfaces in the home that commonly become contaminated include bedside tables, countertops, sink fixtures or doorknobs. The good news is that both the seasonal flu and H1N1 can be killed the same way, by wiping surfaces down with a household disinfectant according to directions on the product label. It is also very important to make sure that tissue and other disposable items used by someone sick with the flu are thrown in the trash after use.

How are seasonal influenza and H1N1 influenza different?



More people are likely to get sick from H1N1

Seasonal influenza occurs every year. Most people have built some immunity to seasonal flu viruses, which limit the number of people who become sick. In contrast, H1N1 is a new flu virus. It appears that most people have little or no immunity so more people could become infected this year. Up until now, most people infected with H1N1 have had a mild illness. A relatively small number of people have died from H1N1, and most have been in the high-risk groups. Also, H1N1 has infected some age groups differently than seasonal flu. This is not unusual for a new influenza virus.

There is a vaccine for the seasonal flu. The vaccine for H1N1 is being developed.

A vaccine currently exists for seasonal flu and is made available to everyone on a yearly basis before and during the months when people usually get sick with the flu. It is still important to get your seasonal flu vaccine this year. For H1N1 flu, scientists are working to develop a new vaccine. The vaccine is expected to be available in the fall. Because it will take some time to make enough vaccine for everyone, groups at high risk of getting H1N1 will get the vaccine first. When the vaccine is ready, information will be available. If you have questions about either vaccine, talk to your health care practitioner.

For more information on seasonal flu and H1N1 (swine-origin) flu go to <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/> or <http://pandemicflu.gov>



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