

Novel H1N1 Flu FACTSHEET

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What is novel H1N1 (swine flu)?

Novel H1N1 is a new influenza A virus causing illness in humans, much in the same way that regular seasonal influenza viruses do. This virus was originally referred to as “swine flu” because many of the genes in this new virus are very similar to the genes in influenza viruses that normally occur in pigs (swine) in North America. However, further scientific study has shown that this new virus actually has genes consistent with flu viruses that normally occur in pigs in Europe and Asia, bird (avian) genes, and human genes.

Novel H1N1 Flu in Humans

Are there human infections with novel H1N1 virus in the U.S.?

Yes. Human infections with the new H1N1 virus are ongoing in the United States. Most people who have become ill with this new virus have recovered without requiring medical treatment.

How does novel H1N1 virus spread?

Spread of novel 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 something – such as 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 novel H1N1 flu virus in people include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. A significant number of people who have been infected with this virus also have reported diarrhea and vomiting.

How severe is illness associated with novel H1N1 flu virus?

Illness with the new H1N1 virus has ranged from mild to severe. While most people who have been sick have recovered without needing medical treatment, hospitalizations and deaths from infection with this virus have occurred. Pregnancy and other previously recognized high risk medical conditions from seasonal influenza appear to be associated with increased risk of complications from this novel H1N1. These underlying conditions include asthma, diabetes, suppressed immune systems, heart disease, kidney disease, neurocognitive and neuromuscular disorders.

What can you do to protect your health?

- 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, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
- 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, 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.

Want more information?

Additional information about novel H1N1 flu and other related health topics can be found at the Department of Health H1N1 page www.doh.dc.gov/flu or by calling 311.

