



## understanding a new influenza strain

# 2009 H1N1 FLU AND YOU

Details below are from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Atlanta, U.S.A.).  
Information is as of August 2009.

## What is 2009 H1N1?

The 2009 H1N1 (referred to as, “swine flu” early on) is a new influenza virus causing illness in people. This new virus was first detected 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 11 June 2009, the World Health Organization (WHO) signaled that a pandemic of 2009 H1N1 flu was underway.

## Why is 2009 H1N1 virus sometimes called “swine flu”?

This 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. However, 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.

## Is 2009 H1N1 virus contagious?

CDC has determined that 2009 H1N1 virus is contagious and is spreading from human to human.

## How does 2009 H1N1 virus spread?

Spread of 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 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 2009 H1N1 flu virus in people include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headaches, chills and fatigue. A significant number of people who have been infected with this virus have also reported diarrhea and vomiting. Severe illnesses and death have occurred as a result of illness associated with this virus.

## How severe is illness associated with 2009 H1N1 flu virus?

Illness with the 2009 H1N1 virus has ranged from mild to severe. While most people who have been sick have recovered without needing medical treatment, hospitalizations from infection with this virus have occurred.

## Who are at “high risk” with the 2009 H1N1 flu virus?

In seasonal flu, certain people are at “high risk” of serious complications. This includes people 65 years and older, children younger than five years old, pregnant women, and people of any age with certain chronic medical conditions. About 70% of people who have been hospitalized with the 2009 H1N1 virus have had one or more medical conditions previously recognized as placing people at “high risk” of serious seasonal flu-related complications. This includes pregnancy, diabetes, heart disease, asthma and kidney disease.



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One thing that appears to be different from seasonal influenza is that adults older than 64 years old do not yet appear to be at increased risk of 2009 H1N1-related complications thus far. CDC laboratory studies have shown that no children and very few adults younger than 60 years old have existing antibodies to 2009 H1N1 flu virus. However, about 1/3 of adults older than 60 may have antibodies against this virus. It is unknown how much, if any, protection may be afforded against 2009 H1N1 flu by any existing antibody.

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

People infected with seasonal and 2009 H1N1 flu shed virus and may be able to infect other from 1 day before getting sick to 5 to 7 days after. This can be longer in some people, especially children and people with weakened immune systems.

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

As of this writing (August 2009), there is no vaccine available to protect against 2009 H1N1 virus. However, a vaccine is in the works and may be available soon.

Below are steps you can take to help prevent the infection and the spread of germs that cause 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, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based 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, 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 keep from making others sick.
- Follow public health advice regarding school closures, avoiding crowds and other social distancing measures.
- Be prepared in case you get sick and need to stay home for a week or so; a supply of over-the-counter medicines, alcohol-based hand rubs, tissues and other items that could be useful while you are sick. This will help avoid the need to make trips out in public while you are ill and contagious.

### What is the best technique for washing my hands to avoid getting the flu?

Washing your hands often will help protect you from germs. The CDC recommends that you wash your hands with soap and warm water, for around 20 seconds. Alcohol-based cleaners or gels may also be used. If using gel, rub your hands until the gel is dry.

### What should I do if I get sick?

You should stay at home and avoid contact with other people. Staying at home means that you should not leave your home except to seek medical care. This means avoiding normal activities, including work, school, travel, shopping, social events, and public gatherings. If you have severe illness or are at high risk for flu complications, contact your health care provider or seek medical care.



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## When should I seek emergency care?

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

In adults:

- 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

In children:

- 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



## Are there medicines to treat 2009 H1N1 infection?

Yes. CDC recommends the use of oseltamivir or zanamivir for the treatment and/or prevention of infection with 2009 H1N1 flu virus. Antiviral drugs are prescription medicines (pills, liquid or inhaled powder) 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 make you feel better faster. They may also prevent serious flu complications. During the current pandemic, the priority use for influenza antiviral drugs is to treat severe illness (e.g. hospitalized patients) and people who are sick who have a condition that places them at high risk for serious flu-related complications.

## How long can influenza virus remain viable on objects (such as books and doorknobs)?

Studies have shown that influenza virus can survive on environmental surfaces and can infect a person for 2 to 8 hours after being deposited on the surface.

## What kills influenza virus?

Influenza virus is destroyed by heat (167-212 °F or 75 to 100 °C). In addition, several chemical germicides, including chlorine, hydrogen peroxide, detergents (soap), iodophors (iodine-based antiseptics) and alcohols are effective against human influenza viruses if used in proper concentration for a sufficient length of time.

## How should linens, eating utensils and dishes of persons infected with influenza virus be handled?

Linens, eating utensils and dishes belonging to those who are sick do not need to be cleaned separately, but these items should not be shared without washing thoroughly first. Eating utensils should be washed either in a dishwasher or by hand with soap and water. Linens (such as bed sheets and towels) should be washed using household laundry soap and tumbled dry on a hot setting. Individuals should avoid “hugging” laundry prior to washing it to prevent contaminating themselves. Individuals should wash their hands with soap and water or alcohol-based hand cleansers immediately after handling dirty laundry.

For more information, visit [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).