



Flu: H1N1 Swine Flu & Seasonal Flu

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Updated October 26, 2009

General Questions

What is the flu?

The flu is a common infectious disease caused by an influenza (flu) virus. The flu usually affects a person's breathing system. Every year from 5 to 20% of people get the flu. People who get the flu usually get it during the fall or winter- that is why it is called seasonal flu.

What is H1N1 swine flu?

H1N1 swine flu is a new influenza (flu) virus that was found in April 2009.

How many people have been infected with H1N1 swine flu?

The exact number of people who have H1N1 swine flu is unknown because usually symptoms are mild and testing is not needed.

How does the flu spread?

Both seasonal flu and H1N1 swine flu spread through tiny wet drops produced when a person coughs, sneezes, or talks. A person without the flu can get it by breathing in these wet drops, or by touching items and surfaces covered with these drops and then touching their mouth, nose, or eyes.

When can someone spread the flu to others?

People who have seasonal flu or H1N1 swine flu may be able to spread it to others about 1 day before getting sick to 5 - 7 days after. Children and people with weak immune systems can spread the H1N1 swine flu virus longer. However, people are most contagious during the first 3 days of illness.

Will schools, public gatherings, or businesses be closed?

Most likely NOT. It is extremely unlikely that schools, public transit, public gatherings, or public areas will be closed. San Francisco is closely watching the situation, is taking steps to vaccinate as many people as possible and taking other steps to slow the spread of infection like having everybody use healthy habits and encouraging people ill with the flu to stay home until 24 hours after their fever is gone.

How can I protect myself from the flu?

Use healthy habits:

- Get vaccinated for seasonal flu and H1N1 swine flu
- Wash hands often with soap or water or use alcohol-based hand rub
- Cover mouths and noses with a tissue (or shirt sleeve) when sneezing, coughing, or nose blowing
- Don't share personal items like toothbrushes or drinks
- Clean frequently touched items and surfaces with soap and water

Is there a vaccine?

Yes. It is important for everyone to get seasonal flu vaccine and H1N1 swine flu vaccine. For more information about vaccine including where to get vaccine visit: www.sfcddcp.org/flu.html.

Do I need to wear a mask?

People who feel well do not need to wear a mask. People who feel sick may be asked by their doctor to wear a mask while in the doctor's office or clinic. People who are sick may choose to wear a mask when around others.

What are signs and symptoms of the flu?

The usual signs and symptoms of both seasonal and H1N1 swine flu are cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills, and feeling very tired. Most people also have a fever. Others may throw-up and have diarrhea.

How serious is the H1N1 swine flu?

H1N1 swine flu is usually mild, but sometimes it can be severe. Some people have needed to go to the hospital and a small number of people have died. This is similar to the seasonal flu which causes about 36,000 deaths in the United States each year. When the H1N1 swine flu was first found in April 2009, there was no vaccine (flu shot) for it- so there was no way to prevent people from getting sick. Now a vaccine for H1N1 swine flu has been made and people will be able to get it this fall.

Who is more likely to get very sick with the flu?

The list of these "high-risk" people is similar for H1N1 swine flu and for seasonal flu:

- People with lung disease like asthma
- People with other medical conditions like diabetes, heart disease, kidney or liver disease, blood cell disease including sickle cell, or neurological disease that affects swallowing or breathing
- Pregnant women and women who have given birth within 2 weeks
- Children age 2 years and under
- Adults age 65 years and over
- People with weak immune systems (due to disease or medicines)

Taking Care of the Flu

What should I do if I get sick?

Taking care of a person with H1N1 swine flu is just like taking care of a person with seasonal flu. If you get sick with flu-like symptoms, stay home and avoid contact with other people except to see the doctor. You can find a copy of our Flu Home Care Guide on our website at: www.sfcdep.org/flu

When should I see a doctor?

Most people sick with the flu have mild disease and do not need to see a doctor or get tested. If you are at high risk for getting very sick with the flu, contact your doctor to discuss the need for treatment. See the answer to "Who is more likely to get very sick with the flu? Also call your doctor right away if you:

- Have difficulty breathing
- Are dehydrated from vomiting and diarrhea
- Have a fever that is higher than 101 degrees after taking fever-reducing medicine like acetaminophen (e.g., Tylenol) or ibuprofen (e.g., Motrin or Advil)
- Feel very sick

What should I do to protect others from getting the flu?

- Stay home and stay away from others until 24 hours after the fever is gone (without the use of fever-reducing medicine like acetaminophen (e.g., Tylenol) or ibuprofen (e.g., Motrin or Advil))
- Do not have visitors
- Try to avoid contact with other household members
- If possible, choose a room in your home away to stay in that is away from others in your household (for example, a spare bedroom with bathroom)
- Choose one person in the household as your caregiver. Your caregiver should not be pregnant, over 64 years old, or have medical conditions like heart disease, lung disease, or weak immune system.
- If you want, wear a face mask when around others. Wearing a face mask limits the spread of tiny infected drops that are released when a person talks, coughs or sneezes.

Have everyone in the house use healthy habits. See the answer to “How can I protect myself?”

Can I take medicines to help me feel better?

To make your symptoms feel better, take medicines that you would normally take like acetaminophen (e.g. Tylenol) or ibuprofen (e.g., Motrin or Advil) if your doctor has told you it is safe for you. If you are under 18 years of age do NOT take aspirin or medicine with aspirin in it (e.g. Pepto-Bismol) because this can cause a rare serious illness called Reye’s syndrome. Also, children under age 4 should not take over-the-counter cold medicines unless their doctor said to take the medicine.

Do I need to take anti-viral medicines to treat the flu virus?

Probably not. Anti-viral medicines are only available with a doctor's prescription. Most people with the flu (H1N1 swine flu or seasonal flu) get better without taking medicine. Your doctor may prescribe anti-viral medicine if you are:

- very sick
- with a lung disease like asthma
- with a medical condition like diabetes, heart disease, kidney or liver disease, blood cell disease including sickle cell, or neurological disease that affects swallowing or breathing
- pregnant
- a child aged 2 years or under
- age 65 and up
- with a weakened immune system (from disease or medicines)

Should people in close contact to me take medicine to prevent the flu?

Most people will not need to take medicine. However, people who have been in close contact with you and who are at high risk for severe flu should contact their doctor. Their doctor will likely ask them to watch carefully for signs of the flu. If they develop symptoms they should call their doctor back as soon as possible for early treatment. Alternatively the doctor may prescribe preventive medicine.

What are the emergency warning signs?

Contact a doctor right away if a young child has these emergency warning signs:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Blue-ish color of skin, lips, or fingertips
- Not drinking enough fluids or not urinating
- Not waking up or not interacting
- Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
- Flu-like symptoms that improve but then come back with fever and worse cough
- Fever with a rash

Contact a doctor right away if an older child or adult has these emergency warning signs:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Not urinating

When going to the doctor's office or the emergency room:

- Inform the staff ahead of time that you have the flu
- If you call an ambulance, let the 911 operator know that you have the flu. Let the ambulance crew know too when they arrive
- Wear a face mask if you can
- Sit away from others as much as possible

Do I need to go to the emergency room if I am only a little sick?

No. The emergency room should be saved for people who are very sick. People should not go to the emergency room for a mild illness.

Where can I get more information?

Visit the San Francisco Department of Public Health website which has information about H1N1 swine flu as well as regular seasonal flu: www.sfgdcp.org/flu. In San Francisco, you can also call 311 to get this information.

**CHECK FOR UPDATED
FLU INFORMATION**

www.sfgdcp.org/flu

or

in San Francisco call 311