

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT H1N1 FLU: A PATIENT'S GUIDE



What is the difference between seasonal influenza and the H1N1 flu?

Seasonal influenza is caused by viruses that have been interacting with humans for many generations. Most people's immune systems have been exposed to these different strains of influenza virus, either through disease or through vaccination, and are therefore able to mount a quick immune response when encountering the same seasonal strain(s) again.

The new 2009 H1N1 influenza virus, also referred to as "swine flu," emerged in the spring of 2009. Humans have never been infected with this strain of influenza virus, so the virus is considered "novel." Novel viruses are dangerous because the human immune system has no previous experience battling them. While seasonal influenza is most threatening to those with weak immune systems, such as the very young and old, the novel H1N1 virus appears to be a threat to healthy, young adults, children and pregnant women. **Although the populations most affected differ, the symptoms of seasonal and novel H1N1 are very similar and can only be distinguished by a medical professional.**

Do I need to get a H1N1 flu shot this season? What about a seasonal influenza vaccine?

The American Medical Association (AMA) recommends that you receive your seasonal influenza vaccine as soon as possible and the H1N1 flu shot when it becomes available. While the seasonal influenza vaccine is unlikely to protect you from 2009 H1N1 influenza, it will help protect you and others in your community from seasonal influenza.

A vaccine for the 2009 H1N1 virus is currently being developed and will be ready later this fall. While the vaccine is available for anyone who wants to protect themselves from 2009 H1N1 influenza, the following groups of people have been identified as high priority for receiving 2009 H1N1 vaccine and are urged to get vaccinated:

- Pregnant women
- Persons who live with or provide care for infants aged

6 months and younger (e.g., parents, siblings and daycare providers)

- Health care and emergency medical services personnel
- Persons aged 6 months to 24 years
- Persons aged 25 to 64 years who have medical conditions that put them at higher risk for influenza-related complications

See www.cdc.gov/H1N1flu for more information on those considered at greatest risk for H1N1 flu-related complications.

What are the symptoms of the H1N1 flu?

The symptoms of the 2009 H1N1 flu virus in people are similar to the symptoms of seasonal flu and 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 2009 H1N1 flu virus also have reported diarrhea and vomiting.

When will the 2009 H1N1 vaccine be available?

Current estimates have the first supplies of 2009 H1N1 vaccine being available at the end of October. At that time, the vaccine—which is being provided at no cost—will be distributed to numerous medical providers across the country who will then administer the vaccine to the public.

Will the 2009 H1N1 vaccine be safe?

The H1N1 vaccine will be manufactured following the same stringent criteria as past seasonal vaccines. Other than providing protection against a different flu strain, the vaccine is essentially equivalent to the current seasonal vaccine of which millions of doses have been safely administered throughout the world. Candidate 2009 H1N1 vaccines are currently being tested in clinical trials to confirm their effectiveness and safety. In addition, numerous surveillance mechanisms are being put in place to continually monitor the vaccine should it be approved for use.

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Important things to remember about the H1N1 flu and seasonal influenza:

Take precautions if you think you have influenza.

If you are sick, you may be ill for a week or longer. You should:

- Stay home and keep away from others as much as possible—including avoiding travel and not going to work or school—for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone except to get medical care or for other necessities.
- If you leave the house to seek medical care, wear a facemask, if available, and cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue. If you must sneeze and don't have a tissue, sneeze into your sleeves.
- In general, avoid contact with other people as much as possible to keep from spreading your illness, especially those at increased risk of severe illness from influenza.
- Wash your hands frequently with soap and warm water to reduce transmission to others. Frequent use of an alcohol-based sanitizer is also effective at reducing transmission of the influenza virus.

Treatment is available for those who are seriously ill.

It is expected that many healthy people will recover from either seasonal or H1N1 influenza without needing medical care. However, if you have severe illness or are at high risk for flu complications, it is imperative to contact your health care provider or seek medical care. (Visit www.cdc.gov/H1N1flu to read more about high-risk populations.) Your health care provider will determine whether flu testing or treatment is needed. If you become ill and experience any warning signs (listed at right), seek emergency medical care.

Seek emergency care if you become ill and experience warning signs.

In children, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- 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

In adults, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- 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

Visit www.ama-assn.org/go/flu or www.cdc.gov/H1N1flu for more information.