

Frequently Asked Questions – General Public

(Revised 8/9/2009)

**This information will be updated as the situation evolves.
Any references in this document to H1N1 refer to the novel H1N1 virus.**

Q: What is the difference between seasonal flu and this new strain of H1N1?

A: Seasonal flu viruses have been circulating in human populations for several seasons, allowing people to build up immunities to them. Most people do not yet have immunity to the new strain of H1N1 flu. A vaccine is available to prevent seasonal flu. A vaccine for novel H1N1 flu is being developed and is expected to be available this fall.

Q: What is a flu pandemic?

A: A flu pandemic occurs when a new flu virus emerges that can infect and be easily spread among individuals because they do not have immunity. In a pandemic, people in a very large geographic area are affected. The extent and severity of a pandemic depends on the specific virus. So far, the novel H1N1 virus has not been especially severe.

Q: What can the public do to get prepared in case there is a flu pandemic?

A: It's important to be prepared for emergencies – including flu pandemics – that may disrupt commercial and community activities. Everyone should have an emergency plan and a disaster supplies kit with enough food and water to last for several days or up to two weeks. For information on emergency planning for families, visit www.TexasPrepares.org (English) or www.TexasPrepara.org (Spanish). Getting seasonal flu vaccine this fall is very important. Getting the novel H1N1 vaccine when it is available will also be important.

Q: What is novel H1N1 Flu (swine flu) and how is it transmitted?

A: The respiratory virus that is currently circulating in the United States is passed from person to person without contact with pigs. The name now being used is novel H1N1 flu. Novel H1N1 flu is a respiratory illness thought to spread in the same way that seasonal flu is spread, which is through people infected with the virus who are coughing or sneezing. It can be spread by touching something with flu viruses on it, such as a tissue or a door knob, and then touching your mouth, eyes, or nose.

Q: How can I avoid getting infected?

A: You can protect yourself from the H1N1 flu by washing your hands frequently with soap and warm water. You also can use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. You should also avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth. Stay away from people who are sick (especially if they have fever, cough and a sore throat). Get plenty of sleep, exercise regularly, manage stress, drink plenty of fluids, and eat nutritious foods.

Q: What are the symptoms of H1N1 flu?

A: Almost all people in Texas with confirmed novel H1N1 flu have had a sudden onset of fever (half having a temperature greater than 102.5oF) and cough. Most have had a sore throat. Almost everyone with H1N1 flu has been taken care of at home and recovered in a few days. Illnesses with a lot of nasal congestion and mild fever are probably not H1N1 flu. Illnesses

with diarrhea and vomiting are probably not H1N1 flu, although some with a confirmed case of H1N1 have had such symptoms.

Other symptoms may include runny nose, body aches, headache, chills, and fatigue. People may have only one or two symptoms besides the fever, or they may have many. People can infect others with the H1N1 flu even before they show symptoms, and they remain contagious for seven or more days after they become sick.

Q: What do I do if I have these symptoms?

A: Stay home if you get sick. Stay home from work, school, errands, and limit close contact with others to keep from infecting them. In most cases people with H1N1 flu will get better without medical attention. If you have been diagnosed with H1N1, stay home while you have symptoms. Wait to be around people until your fever has been gone for 24 hours without taking fever-reducing medications. If you work in a hospital or other healthcare setting around people at high risk of complications from flu, stay home for 7 days after symptoms began or until your symptoms are gone, whichever is longer.

If you are at risk for complications of influenza, call your health care provider. Follow your provider's advice. Most people with nasal congestion and mild fever don't have H1N1 flu.

If you have mild symptoms, do not call your health care provider or visit the hospital emergency room. Get plenty of rest, drink fluids, take fever reducing medications if needed. **WARNING: DO NOT** give aspirin or aspirin-containing medications to children and youth 18 years and younger.

Q: Who is at risk of complications of flu?

A: The following groups of people are at greater risk of complications from H1N1 and seasonal flu:

- Children younger than 5 years old (under 2 years are especially vulnerable)
- Pregnant women
- Adults and children with certain chronic medical conditions including chronic lung problems such as asthma, heart, liver, blood, nervous system, muscular, or metabolic disorders such as diabetes
- Adults and children who have immunodeficiency or immuno-suppression, including that caused by medications such as corticosteroids and chemotherapy, or diseases such as HIV/AIDS
- Children ages 6 months to 18 years who are receiving long-term aspirin therapy and who might be at risk for experiencing Reye syndrome after influenza virus infection
- Persons 50 years old or older, particularly 65 years or older
- People who live in settings such as nursing homes, residential schools, and jails.

Q: What are considered severe symptoms?

A: For Adults:

- Difficulty breathing
- Purple or blue discoloration of the lips
- Vomiting and unable to keep liquids down
- Signs of dehydration such as dizziness when standing, absence of urination, or in infants, a lack of tears when they cry
- Seizures or uncontrolled convulsions
- Loss of consciousness
- Alteration in thinking

For Children:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish or gray skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Not waking up or not interacting
- Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
- Flu-like symptoms that improve then return with fever and worse cough
- Fever with a rash

IF SEVERE SYMPTOMS DEVELOP, CALL YOUR HEALTH CARE PROVIDER. IF THE HEALTHCARE PROVIDER IS NOT AVAILABLE, GO TO THE EMERGENCY ROOM.

Q: Should I be tested for H1N1 flu?

A: Your health care provider will make the decision as to whether you should be tested. Most people do not need to be tested. It will not make a difference in how a person's illness is treated.

Q: Is there a vaccine for H1N1 flu?

A. There is a vaccine under development for H1N1 flu that is expected to be available later in the fall. The seasonal flu vaccine does not provide protection against H1N1 flu but is important in protecting you from other flu viruses that can make you as sick or sicker. This makes ordinary precautions such as covering coughs and sneezes and washing hands even more important. It's also important to be up to date on your other vaccinations, such as Tdap (tetanus/pertussis/diphtheria and Pneumococcal vaccines, to avoid getting infected with more than one germ at once.

Q: If I experience flu symptoms, do I need medication?

A: Call your health care provider about the need for medication. People at risk of complications from flu may be prescribed antiviral medication. Antibiotics are not effective against viruses and should not be requested. Most people will need only fever-reducing medications such as

acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen. **WARNING: DO NOT** give aspirin or aspirin-containing medications to children and youth 18 years and younger.

Q: Is there a place to go for free treatment?

A: If you have symptoms of influenza, seek medical care as you usually do. If you normally receive your care free, treatment will be free. If you have insurance, insurance will cover the cost of care as usual. Call 2-1-1 for information about possible resources in your community.

Q: How do you prevent the spread of H1N1 flu?

A: If you are sick, stay home unless you have a doctor's appointment. Avoid being around other people because you can give the illness to others. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze and then throw the tissue away. Or cough and sneeze into your sleeve. Wash your hands frequently with soap and water or use hand sanitizer. Be sure to do this after coughing or sneezing.

Q: What should I do if someone I live with is sick with flu-like symptoms?

A: When providing care to a household member who is sick with influenza, protect yourself and others by:

- Keeping the sick person away from other people as much as possible
- Reminding the sick person to cover their coughs, and clean their hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub often, especially after coughing and/or sneezing.
- Reminding everyone in the household to clean their hands often, using soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub
- Asking your healthcare provider if household contacts of the sick person – particularly those contacts who may have chronic health conditions – should take antiviral medications such as oseltamivir (Tamiflu[®]) or zanamivir (Relenza[®]) to prevent the flu.

Additional details on caring for a sick person such as laundry, cleaning and having visitors are available at the CDC H1N1 flu Web site: www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/guidance_homecare.htm.

Q: What should I do if someone I live with has confirmed H1N1 flu?

A: Precautions are the same as above.

Q: Can you expect more cases to be reported?

A: Yes. The virus has been found across the United States and in many other countries. We expect that novel H1N1 will be one of the viruses that circulates widely this flu season (usually October to May) along with other seasonal flu viruses. Texas will likely have millions of cases of influenza, and many of those will be caused by novel H1N1 virus.

Q: Will schools be closed if a lot of children start getting sick?

A: The CDC has announced that they are no longer recommending that schools close. If the situation changes, local independent school districts will notify parents, students, and teachers through the local news media, just as they do for weather closures.

Q: If they close the schools, can my children play with other kids?

A: Students should not be around each other when schools are closed or they may catch the flu from their friends.

Q: I work with the elderly; should I continue to work with them?

A: Anyone with symptoms of a respiratory illness should stay home and avoid close contact with others. Consult your employer for employment specific policy.

Q: If we have traveled outside the United States recently, what should we do?

A: Take the same precautions to prevent illness as recommended for those who have not left the country. Get your seasonal flu vaccination as soon as possible and, when available, a novel H1N1 flu vaccination. Be sure you are up to date on other vaccines too.

Practice good hand washing technique, use alcohol-based hand sanitizers frequently, and sneeze or cough into a tissue or your sleeve.

If you become ill and you are at risk for complications of influenza (see complications above), call your doctor or health care provider.

Q: How do we get more information/updates?

A: Continue to monitor the Department of State Health Services website (www.texasflu.org) for information, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website (www.cdc.gov) and your local news.