

H1N1 Flu Virus

Summary Information

Associated Press
August 2009

H1N1 is a new flu virus of swine origin that infected people in Mexico and the USA in March and April 2009 and then spread to become a worldwide pandemic. There is no vaccine available for the virus yet, though testing of one is currently in the human phase.

According to the [Centers for Disease Control Web site](#), the symptoms of the H1N1 virus include fever, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people with the virus have reported diarrhea and vomiting. If you feel any of these symptoms, see your doctor immediately.

H1N1 flu is thought to spread in the same way that regular seasonal influenza viruses spread, mainly through the coughs and sneezes of people who are sick. But it may also be spread by touching objects that are carrying the virus and then touching your nose or mouth. While the H1N1 virus has sickened tens of thousands of people and closed summer camps in a season when there should be little flu activity, it has killed far fewer than the 36,000 Americans who die from seasonal influenza each year.

Contact your doctor if you experience flu-like symptoms, especially shortness of breath or a fever higher than 101 degrees. If you are diagnosed with the H1N1 virus, your doctor may prescribe the antiviral medications Tamiflu or Relenza. You will need to stay home until you finish the treatment. The CDC says you should stay home until 24 hours after your fever breaks.

Unless you have an underlying medical condition, you should not visit the emergency room if all you have is a slight fever and mild headache, says Dr. Amy Ray, an infectious disease and public health specialist with University Hospitals Case Medical Center in Cleveland, Ohio. The ER can be a breeding ground for flu viruses.

Everyone is susceptible to this virus, but it seems to affect children, young adults and pregnant women most. Pregnant women definitely should get vaccinated against H1N1, as the virus can affect the brains of unborn babies and 6 percent of the deaths in the U.S. have occurred in pregnant women. "If you are going to be pregnant during this time, be the first in line to get the vaccine," Ray says.

Just like colleges and universities, public schools across the country are gearing up to combat the spread of H1N1. In Texas, many districts are stocking up on hand sanitizers and printing H1N1 prevention posters. Mayor Robert Cluck of Arlington, Texas, is hoping to "take the fear factor out of the flu" by providing basic information to parents before school starts on Aug. 24, he told the Associated Press. The CDC recommends that students get H1N1 vaccinations, which are anticipated to be ready this fall.

The government is urging school districts not to close down as the flu spreads in the fall. But children with symptoms should be kept home from school. If a child's classmate has the flu, Ray said it is OK to send him or her to school, as long as the infected child is not at school. The same goes for working adults.

Cramped dorm rooms, fraternity parties, and communal living spaces make colleges and universities a breeding ground for germs. That's why campuses such as Ohio State University are implementing a variety of tools to combat H1N1. "We have hand sanitizer centers all around the campus," Dr. Roger Miller of OSU told FOXNews.com. Ever since seven cases of the virus were confirmed at the university last spring, Miller said the big message to students is this: If you are feeling sick, avoid contact with others. Avoid drinking out of the same glass, cover your mouth when you sneeze or cough. And if you are experiencing flu-like symptoms, isolate yourself in your dorm room and do not return to class until your fever has been gone for at least 24 hours.

You may have seen many pictures of people wearing masks in order to protect themselves from the H1N1 virus. Ray said she believes the masks become ineffective the minute they become moist, which happens rather quickly.

Washing your hands often will help you avoid getting the H1N1 virus. "Hand washing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds after touching objects, surfaces or another person's hands can physically remove viruses," says Dr. Clifford W. Bassett, assistant clinical professor of medicine at the Long Island College Hospital and a faculty member of the NYU School of Medicine.

Use alcohol-based liquid hand sanitizers frequently when water isn't available or when washing hands is not possible. If using a gel, rub your hands until the gel is dry. Sanitizers do not require water to work; the alcohol in them kills germs. But remember that not all germicidal lotions will adequately kill cold viruses.