Healthy Living

Patient Information from the American Chiropractic Association

H1N1 Flu Virus

With H1N1 flu dominating the media this year, many are concerned about falling victim to the new virus. Learn what you can do to protect yourself and your family and minimize its spread.

What is H1N1 virus?

H1N1 (sometimes called "swine flu") is a new influenza virus. The virus has two genes from flu viruses that normally circulate in pigs in Europe and Asia, as well as in bird (avian) genes and human genes. Just like the seasonal flu, the H1N1 flu virus is contagious and spreads from human to human through coughing and sneezing or close contact with objects that have the flu virus on their surfaces.

Patients who are sick with H1N1 are usually contagious for up to one week from onset of symptoms. The virus can stay on objects (such as doorknobs and books) for two to eight hours after contamination.

Is H1N1 virus dangerous?

The symptoms of the virus include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills, and fatigue. Some people may vomit and have diarrhea. Others may experience the flu without fever. Most people who become sick with H1N1 virus have a mild illness and recover without requiring treatment.

Some cases of severe illnesses and deaths have occurred as a result of complications associated with this virus. Complications from H1N1 virus most typically have occurred in people who belong to high-risk groups: young children, people 65 and older, pregnant women, and patients with diabetes, heart disease, asthma, suppressed immune systems, and kidney disease.

What do I do if I am sick with H1N1?

- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.

Just like the seasonal flu, the H1N1 flu virus is contagious and spreads from human to human through coughing and sneezing or close contact with objects that have the flu virus on their surfaces.

- If a tissue is not available, cover your mouth with the crook of your elbow.
- Try to stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is completely gone without the help of medicine, except to get health care and other necessities.
- Limit contact with others as much as possible to avoid spreading the virus to them.
- Consider wearing a face mask if you are sick with the virus or if you are caring for a person who is sick.

- Keep bedside tables, bathroom surfaces, kitchen counters, children's toys, and other surfaces clean to prevent the spread of the virus.
- Wash linens used by persons infected with the virus by using laundry soap and tumble dry on a hot setting. Wash your hands with soap and water immediately after handling dirty laundry.
- Wash eating utensils and dishes of persons infected with the virus in a dishwasher or with soap and water.

How can I protect myself and my family from H1N1?

- Frequently wash your hands with soap and water for 15 to 20 seconds each time.
- If soap and water are not available, use alcohol-based hand wipes or sanitizers.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- When possible, avoid close contact with sick people. If possible, reduce time spent in crowded settings.
- Open the windows to improve airflow in your living space.
- Practice good health habits, including getting adequate sleep, eating nutritious food, staying physically active, and reducing stress.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends the H1V1 vaccine as protection against the virus. For more information, visit www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu. ■

Sources:

www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/
www.who.int/csr/disease/swineflu/en/index.html
www.flu.gov

When to Seek Emergency Medical Care

Emergency warning signs 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

Emergency warning signs in adults:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness or 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

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For more information on prevention and wellness, or to find a doctor of chiropractic near you, go to the Patient Information section on ACA's Web site at www.acatoday.org or call 800-986-4636.

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