

# Information about the Seasonal and 2009 H1N1 Influenza Viruses

## What is the flu?

The flu (influenza) is an infection of the nose, throat, and lungs caused by influenza viruses. Flu viruses cause illness, hospital stays and deaths in the United States each year. There are many different flu viruses and sometimes a new flu virus emerges to make people sick.

## What is the 2009 H1N1 flu?

The 2009 H1N1 flu is a new and very different influenza virus that is spreading worldwide among people. This new virus was called “swine flu” at first because it has pieces of flu viruses found in pigs in the past. However, the 2009 H1N1 virus has not been detected in U.S. pigs. Influenza is unpredictable, but scientists believe that the new H1N1 virus will cause illness, hospital stays and deaths in the United States over the coming months. This flu season, the new virus may cause a lot more people to get sick than during a regular flu season. It also may cause more hospital stays and deaths than seasonal flu.

## How serious is the flu?

The flu can be very serious, especially for those who have one or more chronic medical conditions. These conditions, which can result in more severe illness from influenza including the new H1N1 virus, include:

- Asthma or other lung problems
- Diabetes
- Weakened immune systems
- Kidney disease
- Heart problems
- Neurological and neuromuscular disorders

## How does flu spread?

Both the 2009 H1N1 flu and seasonal flu are thought to spread mostly from person to person through the coughs and sneezes of people who are sick with influenza. People also may get sick by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose.

## What are the symptoms of the flu?

Symptoms of seasonal flu and the 2009 H1N1 flu include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people also may have vomiting and diarrhea.

## How long can a sick person spread the flu to others?

People infected with seasonal and the 2009 H1N1 flu shed the viruses and may be able to infect others from 1 day before getting sick to 5 to 7 days after. This can be longer in some people, especially children and people with weakened immune systems and in people infected with the 2009 H1N1 flu.

## **How can I protect myself against the flu?**

Get a seasonal flu vaccine to protect yourself against seasonal flu viruses. Take everyday steps to prevent the spread of all flu viruses and:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. If soap and water are not available, alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Try to avoid having close contact (about 6 feet) with sick people, including anyone in the household who is sick.
- Keep surfaces like bedside tables, surfaces in the bathroom, kitchen counters and toys for children clean by wiping them down with a household disinfectant according to directions on the product label.
- Throw away tissues and other disposable items used by sick persons in your household in the trash.

## **Is there a vaccine to protect myself from H1N1 flu?**

A vaccine against the 2009 H1N1 flu is being produced and will be available in the weeks ahead as an option for the prevention of the new H1N1 flu. A vaccine against seasonal flu is available each fall and winter. More information about the new H1N1 flu vaccine and the seasonal flu vaccine is available on the CDC Web site.

## **Is there medicine to treat the flu?**

Antiviral drugs can treat both seasonal flu and the new H1N1 flu. These drugs can make people feel better and get better sooner. But they need to be prescribed by a doctor and they work best when started during the first 2 days of illness. These drugs can be given to children. The priority use for these drugs is to treat people who are seriously ill or who have a medical condition that puts them at high risk of serious flu complications.

## **If I have a family member at home who is sick with H1N1 flu, should I go to work?**

If you feel well you can go to work as usual, but you should monitor your health daily and take everyday precautions such as washing your hands with soap and water.

***If you become ill, you should notify your supervisor and the Employee Health Nurse at 773.256.5940, and then stay home.***