

# H1N1 Influenza: Are You Prepared?

## Safety and Health

Preparation and good planning are key to staying safe and healthy during a pandemic. Because the current H1N1 *swine* flu is a new type of flu, previous flu shots or flu illness won't provide you with immunity from the new flu. Over the past 4–5 months, health professionals and scientists have been actively working to understand the new flu and develop plans to decrease the number of people who will fall ill. There is no way to predict how severe or virulent the new flu will be.



### *What you need to know:*

- Steps you can take to stay healthy
- When to seek medical help
- How to take care of a sick person in your home

**Follow these common-sense steps to limit the spread of germs and reduce your chances of getting the flu:**



- Wash hands frequently with soap and water.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
- Put used tissues in a wastebasket.
- Cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve if you don't have a tissue.
- Clean your hands after coughing or sneezing. Use soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Stay at home if you are sick.
- Of course, eating a balanced diet, exercising, and getting plenty of rest will give you a good foundation for staying healthy.

## When to Seek Medical Help

Symptoms of the new H1N1 flu virus are similar to seasonal flu and include:

- fever
- cough
- sore throat
- runny or stuffy nose
- body aches
- headache
- chills
- fatigue
- According to flu.gov, a significant number of sick people also reported diarrhea and vomiting.

High risk groups for the new H1N1 have not yet been identified, but high risk populations for seasonal flu include:

- People over age 65,
- children younger than 5,
- pregnant women,
- people with chronic medical conditions (asthma, diabetes, heart disease), and
- people whose immune systems are not strong due to chemotherapy or HIV.

**Emergency warning signs in children that need immediate medical attention:**

- 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 doesn't want to be held, and
- flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough.



**Emergency warning signs in adults that need immediate medical attention:**

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath,
- pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen,
- sudden dizziness,
- confusion,
- severe or persistent vomiting, and
- flu-like symptoms that improve but then return with fever and worse cough.

## If You are Sick, Stay Home!

You may be ill for a week or longer. Stay home and avoid contact with other people, except to seek medical care. If you leave the house, wear a mask or cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue. With seasonal flu, people may be contagious from one day before they develop symptoms to up to 7 days after they get sick. Younger children may be contagious for longer periods of time.

## Caring for Your Sick Loved Ones at Home

**If you are caring for someone with H1N1 at home, you should:**

- Keep the sick person away from other people as much as possible.
- Remind them to cover their coughs and sneezes and clean hands afterwards.
- Have everyone in the household clean their hands often.
- Ask the health care provider if household contacts of the sick person (particularly those with chronic health conditions) should take antiviral medications such as Tamiflu® or Relenza® to prevent flu.

**If you are sick with H1N1 flu and being taken care of at home, you should:**

- Check with your health care provider about any special care you may need due to pregnancy, diabetes, heart disease, asthma or emphysema.
- Check with your health care provider about whether you should take antiviral medications.
- Stay home for 7 days after your symptoms begin or until you have been symptom-free for 24 hours, whichever is longer.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Drink clear fluids to ward off dehydration.
- Cover coughs and sneezes and clean hands afterwards with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Avoid close contact with others.
- Be watchful of emergency signs that might indicate you need to seek medical attention.



## Cleaning and Disinfecting Surfaces

- **Follow label instructions carefully when using disinfectants and cleaners.** Pay attention to any hazard warnings and instructions on labels for using personal protective items such as household gloves. Do not mix disinfectants and cleaners unless the labels indicate it is safe to do so. Combining certain products such as chlorine bleach and ammonia can be harmful, resulting in serious injury or death.
- **Keep hard surfaces like kitchen counter tops, tabletops, desktops and bathroom surfaces clean and disinfected.** Clean surface with a commercial product that is both detergent (cleans) and disinfectant (kills germs). These products can be used when surfaces are not visibly dirty. Another way is to wash the surface with general household cleaner (soap or detergent), rinse with water, and follow with disinfectant. This method should be used for visibly dirty surfaces. Use disinfectants on surfaces that are touched often.
- **Keep surfaces touched by more than one person clean and disinfected (doorknobs, refrigerator door handle, telephone, computer keyboard and mouse, remote control, video game control, microwave, etc.).** Use sanitizer cloths to wipe electronic items that are touched often and car surfaces such as door handles, steering wheel and gear shift.

### Recommended laundry practices:

- Gently gather soiled clothing, bedding and linens without creating a lot of motion or fluffing.
- Clean hands after handling soiled laundry items.
- Use washing machine cycles, detergents and laundry additives as normal.
- Dry cleaned laundry items as normal; line- or air-drying can be used to dry items when machine drying is not indicated.
- Clean hands before removing clean laundry from washer or dryer.

### Recommended waste disposal practices:

- Toss tissues into waste baskets.
- Place waste baskets where they are easy to use.
- Avoid touching used tissues and other waste when emptying waste baskets.
- Clean hands after emptying waste baskets.

For more information:

[Virginia Department of Health](#)  
[Centers for Disease Control \(CDC\) H1N1 Flu Information](#)



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