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Flu Prevention



❖ INSIGHTS FOR FAMILIES is provided by your child's school in recognition of your role as a partner in education. Written by Judy McDaniel, communications consultant, and based on information from the Center for Disease Control.

As we move through the annual flu season, we continue to hear news reports about the H1N1 flu, often referred to as the swine flu. Here is some information about the H1N1 flu and prevention tips from the Center for Disease Control (CDC) to help you and your family avoid the flu.

What is H1N1 flu?

H1N1 is normally a respiratory disease of pigs caused by type A influenza viruses. People do not normally get H1N1 swine flu, but human infections can and do happen. This particular new influenza H1N1 strain is causing illness in people. The virus is spreading from person-to-person worldwide, in much the same way that regular seasonal influenza viruses spread.

The Novel (new) H1N1 flu virus is a mixture of two different genes from pigs, as well as genes from birds and humans. It is thought that the mixed genes may be why the new flu strain is easily infecting humans. Also, as a new strain, humans have no immunity to it.

The largest number of cases has appeared in people ages 5-24 years.

How does H1N1 flu spread from person to person?

When people sick with H1N1 flu cough or sneeze, they spread germs through respiratory droplets to others through the air or onto nearby surfaces. Other people breathe in the infected respiratory droplets or come in contact with contaminated surfaces and then touch their own mucous membranes (nose, mouth, eyes). Some viruses and bacteria can live on hard surfaces such as tables, handrails, doorknobs, desks, etc., for several hours. Sick people may be able to infect others beginning 1-2 days before symptoms develop and up to 7 days after becoming ill (children may shed the virus for more than 10 days after becoming sick). You may be able to pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick as well as while you are sick.

What can you do to keep from getting sick?

- ❖ **WASH YOUR HANDS.** Especially wash your hands after touching surfaces that may be contaminated with the flu virus. Use alcohol-based hand gels if soap and water are not available.
- ❖ **Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.** Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it. You may also cough or sneeze into your sleeve (not your hands).

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- ❖ Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth as much as possible.
- ❖ Try to stay in good general health. Get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids, and eat nutritious foods.
- ❖ Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- ❖ STAY home if you are sick and limit exposure to other people even at home. The CDC is currently recommending that people with flu-like illness remain at home until at least 24 hours after they are free of fever or signs of a fever without fever-reducing medications.
- ❖ **Vaccinations** — There are two kinds of vaccinations for this year's flu season: The seasonal flu vaccine and the H1N1 flu vaccines (a 2 shot series). The seasonal flu vaccine will not provide protection against the novel H1N1 influenza; however, it may help prevent someone from getting both types of flu at the same time. The H1N1 vaccine is not intended to replace the seasonal flu vaccine. Contact your health care provider to discuss your need for flu vaccinations for this flu season.

For more information on pandemic flu individual/family planning as well as general information see:

- ❖ U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services: <http://www.pandemicflu.gov>
- ❖ Center for Disease Control: <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu>