

Answers to your questions about the H1N1 virus with tips to prevent infection and stay healthy



Questions and answers about the H1N1 virus (also called swine flu):*

What is the new influenza A H1N1 virus?

H1N1 is a new influenza virus causing illness in people. The first cases in the United States appeared in April 2009. Other countries, including Mexico and Canada, have reported people sick with the virus. This new virus is spreading from person-to-person, probably in much the same way that regular seasonal influenza viruses spread.

Why is this H1N1 virus sometimes called "swine flu?"

H1N1 was originally referred to as "swine flu" because laboratory testing showed that many of the genes in this new virus were very similar to influenza viruses that normally occur in North American pigs. Further study has shown that this new virus is very different. It has two genes from flu viruses that normally circulate in pigs in Europe and Asia, as well as avian genes and human genes. Scientists call this a "quadruple reassortant" virus.

What are the signs and symptoms of this virus in people?

The symptoms of the H1N1 virus in people are similar to the symptoms of seasonal flu and include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. A significant number of people with this virus have also reported diarrhea and vomiting.

How does this new H1N1 virus spread?

Scientists believe the H1N1 virus is spreading the same way that seasonal flu spreads. Flu viruses spread person-to-person when people who have the flu cough or sneeze. You can also be infected by touching something with the flu virus on it and then touching your mouth or nose.

Are there medicines to treat infection with this new virus?

The CDC recommends the use of oseltamivir (Tamiflu) or zanamivir (Relenza) for the treatment and/or prevention of infection with the new influenza A (H1N1) virus. Antiviral drugs are prescription medicines that fight against the flu by keeping flu viruses from reproducing in your body. If you get sick, antiviral drugs can make your illness milder and make you feel better faster. They may also prevent serious flu complications.

Tips to avoid infection and stay healthy

Here is what you can do to stay healthy:

Wash your hands with soap and water regularly such as:

- Before and after you eat your meals
- After you go to the bathroom
- After you have been in a public place
- Use antibacterial hand cleaners if you are not able to wash your hands with water
- Try not to touch your eyes, nose and mouth
- Stay away from people who are sick

Flu germs spread through the air. Here is what you can do to stop the spread of germs:

- 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 after you cough or sneeze

If you get sick:

- Stay home from school or work
- Try not to have contact with other people

If you think you have the flu:

- Call or go see your doctor right away
- Do not go to work or school

Hand hygiene

Hand hygiene has frequently been cited as the single most important practice to reduce the transmission of infectious agents. The term "hand hygiene" includes both hand washing with antimicrobial soap and water and the use of alcohol-based products (gels, rinses, foams) containing an emollient that does not require the use of water.

How to wash your hands with soap and water:

- If you are in a public restroom, use a paper towel to turn the faucet on and off.
- Wet your hands first with water. Avoid hot water because water that is too hot may prevent you from washing for the appropriate amount of time to kill germs.
- Apply a quarter size dollop of soap.
- Rub hands together for 15 seconds, about the time it takes to sing Yankee Doodle Dandy once through or Happy Birthday twice.
- Cover all surfaces of the hands and fingers.
- Rinse hands with water and towel dry.

Wash your hands with plain soap and water or with an antimicrobial soap and water in the following circumstances:

- Your hands are visibly soiled (dirty)
- Your hands are visibly contaminated with respiratory secretions (after coughing or sneezing)
- Before and after food preparation and eating
- After using the restroom

How to use alcohol-based hand rubs:

- Apply a nickel size dollop of alcohol rub or gel to the palm of one hand and rub hands together.
- Cover all surfaces of hands and fingers, including areas around and under fingernails.
- Continue rubbing hands together until alcohol dries, about 15-25 seconds.

*Excerpted from "Questions & Answers H1N1 Flu (Swine Flu) and You" on the CDC website. For more questions and answers, visit www.cdc.gov.

**Courtesy of Hand Hygiene Resource Center.

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In the absence of visible soiling of the hands, approved alcohol-based products for hand disinfection are preferred over antimicrobial soap or plain soap and water because of their superior microbicidal activity, reduced drying of the skin, and convenience. You can even use alcohol-based hand rub products right at your desk.

Work space hygiene

Germs can also be transmitted from contaminated hard surfaces at work. The influenza virus is viable for up to 2 days on work surfaces including telephones, computers, keyboards, and doorknobs. Therefore, it is critical that employees take steps to keep their work areas clean.

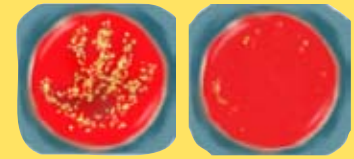
Use a disinfectant cleaning spray and disposable paper towels to clean your workspace. Pay special attention to the following surfaces:

- Desktops
- Keyboards (do not use liquid sprays to clean keyboards)
- Telephones (dial buttons and receivers)
- Objects that are frequently handled by yourself and others, such as staplers, copiers, doorknobs, etc
- Perform hand hygiene after cleaning your workspace

Social distancing

Social distancing refers to methods to reduce the frequency and closeness of contact between people. Generally, social distancing refers to mass gatherings of people, but the same methods can be applied to the workplace.

Why is hand washing important? Take a look.**



The slide on the left shows a microscopic view of the germs on a person's hand after touching a contaminated hard surface.

The slide on the right shows a microscopic view of the germs on the same person's hand after proper hand hygiene.

Social distancing methods include:

- When around people who are coughing or sneezing, keep your distance by at least three feet
- Avoid meeting people face-to-face; instead use the telephone or video conferencing
- Avoid any unnecessary travel
- Avoid hand shaking and other close contact (such as hugs, kisses, etc.)
- Avoid crowded places (large meetings, cafeterias, auditoriums, etc)
- Consider telework

Tips when using public modes of transportation

- When flying, bring along alcohol-based disinfectant wipes to clean seatbelt buckles and tray tables
- When using public restrooms, use a paper towel to open and close the doors
- Wash your hands when you get off the plane, train or bus