

Novel H1N1 Influenza Fact Sheet

What is novel H1N1 influenza?

Novel H1N1 is a new influenza (flu) virus spreading from person to person in the same way as seasonal flu. This is mainly through coughing or sneezing by a person with influenza or when an individual touches a surface or object with flu viruses, then touches their mouth, nose or eyes.

What are the signs and symptoms of novel H1N1 flu?

The symptoms of novel H1N1 flu virus in people include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. A significant number of people who have been infected with this virus also have reported diarrhea and vomiting

How long can an infected person spread this virus to others?

People infected with seasonal and novel H1N1 flu shed virus and may be able to infect others from 1 day before showing symptoms to 5 to 7 days after they become ill. This can be longer in some people, especially children and people with weakened immune systems and in people infected with the novel H1N1 virus.

Prevention measures:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue or the inside of your elbow 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 or use alcohol-based hand sanitizers.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.

What if you experience symptoms?

- If you are sick, then you need to stay home. You must stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone [without the use of a fever-reducing medicine, like acetaminophen (e.g. Tylenol) or ibuprofen (e.g. Advil, Motrin)]. A fever is defined as 100 degrees Fahrenheit or 37.8 degrees Celsius.
- Avoid normal activities such as work, school, travel, shopping, social events and public gatherings and venues.
- If you are at high risk for complications of influenza or have severe symptoms, then call your health care provider. Your health care provider will determine if you need testing and/or treatment.

Who is at high risk for complications of influenza?

If you are not sure if you are at high risk for complications, discuss with your healthcare provider.

- Children younger than 5 years of age (severe complications are higher amongst those younger than 2 years).

- Adults 65 years of age and older (This group is at lower risk of infection from novel H1N1 compared to younger age groups. However, as with seasonal influenza, people 65 or older who develop novel H1N1 influenza infection are at increased risk of influenza-related complications compared to younger adults.).
- Persons with the following conditions:
- Persons younger than 19 years of age who are receiving long-term aspirin therapy.
- Residents of nursing homes and other chronic-care facilities.

How do I prevent the spread of novel H1N1 flu, if I am ill?

- Stay home, unless you have to see your healthcare provider.
- Avoid being around others to prevent spreading the virus.
- Cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing, then throw the tissue in the trash can. Or, cough or sneeze into your sleeve or the inside of your elbow.
- Wash your hands frequently with soap and warm water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

When can I return to work or school? When can my child return to school?

You must stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone [without the use of a fever-reducing medicine, like acetaminophen (e.g. Tylenol) or ibuprofen (e.g. Advil, Motrin)]. A fever is defined as 100 degrees Fahrenheit or 37.8 degrees Celsius.

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

Employees who are well but who have an ill family member at home with novel H1N1 flu can go to work as usual. These employees should monitor their health every day, and take everyday precautions including washing their hands often with soap and water, especially after they cough or sneeze. If they begin to have flu-like symptoms, they should immediately go home.

How long can influenza virus remain viable on objects (such as books and doorknobs)?

Studies have shown that influenza virus can survive on environmental surfaces and can infect a person for 2 to 8 hours after being deposited on the surface.

How do influenza viruses spread?

Germs can be spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose, or mouth. Droplets from a cough or sneeze of an infected person move through the air. Germs can be spread when a person touches respiratory droplets from another person on a surface like a desk, for example, and then touches their own eyes, mouth or nose before washing their hands.

What household cleaning should be done to prevent the spread of influenza virus?

To prevent the spread of influenza virus, it is important to keep surfaces (especially bedside tables, surfaces in the bathroom, kitchen counters, door knobs, handles, and toys for children) clean by wiping them down with a household disinfectant according to directions on the product label.

How should linens, eating utensils and dishes of persons infected with influenza virus be handled?

Linens, eating utensils, and dishes used by those who are sick do not need to be cleaned separately. However, it is important that these items not be shared without washing them thoroughly first.

- Linens (such as bed sheets and towels) should be washed by using household laundry soap and tumbled dry on a hot setting. Individuals should avoid “hugging” laundry prior to washing it to prevent contaminating themselves. Individuals should wash their hands with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer immediately after handling dirty laundry, dishes or other items used by someone who is ill.
- Eating utensils should be washed either in a dishwasher or by hand with water and soap.

Is it necessary to wear a facemask? If so, under what conditions?

Very little is known about the benefits of wearing facemasks or respirators to help control the spread of influenza in community settings. What is known is that facemasks are not entirely effective in preventing inhalation of small particles, which is one potential route of influenza transmission. Use of facemasks generally is not recommended except for healthcare workers in the occupational setting.

People should consider wearing a facemask during a **severe** influenza outbreak if:

- They are sick with the flu and think they might have close contact with other people (within about 3 feet). Remember, individuals sick with the flu should stay home and avoid public venues except to seek medical care;
- They live with someone who has flu symptoms (and therefore might be in the early stages of infection);
- They will be spending time in a crowded public place and thus may be in close contact with infected people; or
- They are well and do not expect to be in close contact with a sick person but need to be in a crowded place.

When using facemasks or N95 respirators, please remember:

- Used facemasks and N95 respirators should be taken off and thrown away in the regular trash so they don't touch anything else.
- Avoid reusing disposable facemasks and N95 respirators if possible.
- After you take off a facemask or N95 respirator, clean your hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

Information adapted from www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/qa.htm and www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/recommendations.htm on 09/01/2009.