

Novel H1N1 (Swine) Flu

What is Novel H1N1 (swine) flu?

Swine flu, properly known as Novel H1N1 influenza, is a respiratory disease caused by type A influenza viruses. The infection was originally called “swine” flu because it originated from pigs in Mexico, emerging from its animal host to infect humans. Humans, pigs and birds share flu viruses frequently, and the genes of these viruses are modified each time they are transmitted from animals to humans and vice versa. These viruses are rarely capable of sustained human-to-human transmission, but on the rare occasion that this type of transmission does happen, a new (“novel”) influenza virus with human, pig and bird genes emerges and a pandemic results.

Is Novel H1N1 flu virus contagious?

CDC has determined that the Novel H1N1 virus is contagious and spreads easily from human to human. Current evidence suggests that it is spread similarly to seasonal influenza.

What are the signs and symptoms of Novel H1N1 flu in people?

The symptoms of Novel H1N1 flu in people are similar to the symptoms of regular human flu, except that patients with Novel H1N1 flu may also have gastrointestinal symptoms.

They include:

- fever
- cough
- sore throat
- body aches
- headache
- chills
- fatigue
- sometimes diarrhea and vomiting

How does Novel H1N1 flu spread?

Flu viruses are spread mainly from person to person through coughing or sneezing of people with influenza. Sometimes people may become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose. Infected people may be able to infect others beginning one day before symptoms develop and up to seven or more days after becoming sick. That means that 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 I do to protect myself from getting sick?

You can lessen your chances of becoming ill if you:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue or the bend 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. The CDC recommends washing for at least 15 seconds. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- Get vaccinated.

Are there medicines to treat Novel H1N1 flu?

Yes. If you get sick, antiviral drugs can make your illness milder and make you feel better faster. They may also prevent serious flu complications. For treatment, antiviral drugs work best if they are started soon after getting sick (within two days of symptoms).

What should I do if I get sick?

If you live in areas where Novel H1N1 influenza cases have been identified and you become ill with influenza-like symptoms, including the symptoms listed previously, you may want to contact your primary health care provider, particularly if you are worried about your symptoms. Your health care provider will determine whether influenza testing or treatment is needed.

If you are sick, you should stay home and avoid contact with other people as much as possible to keep from spreading your illness to others.

In children, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Not waking up or not interacting
- Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
- Flu-like symptoms that improve but then return with fever and worse cough
- Fever with a rash

In adults, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting

If you or your child has any of the above symptoms, seek emergency medical help.

How serious is Novel H1N1 flu infection?

Like seasonal flu, Novel H1N1 flu in humans can vary in severity from mild to severe. It is seldom fatal in the United States, but death is a possibility, especially in those who have other health conditions.

Can I get Novel H1N1 influenza from eating or preparing pork?

No. Swine influenza viruses are not spread by food. You cannot get swine influenza from eating pork or pork products. Eating properly handled and cooked pork products is safe.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/general_info.htm

