

Frequently Asked Questions About Seasonal Flu and 2009 H1N1 Flu (Swine Flu)



Department of Health & Human Services

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What is flu?

Influenza (flu) is a disease of the body's respiratory system that is easily spread from person to person. Symptoms include sudden fever $\geq 100^{\circ}$ F, cough, muscle aches, headache and general weakness. Flu usually also causes runny nose and sore throat. Symptoms can range from very mild to very severe.

What are the different types of flu?

Flu viruses are divided into 2 types, Influenza A and Influenza B. Influenza A is again divided into different types; the most common types seen during the regular influenza season are H1N1 and H3N2. Each year the flu shot includes 3 strains: 1 H1N1, 1 H3N2, and 1 Type B. Seasonal H1N1 is different than the 2009 H1N1. A separate 2009 H1N1 flu (Swine Flu) shot will be available fall 2009.

What is 2009 H1N1 flu (swine flu)?

This is a new type of flu that was first seen in humans in April, 2009. Symptoms are very similar to seasonal flu.

Is flu dangerous?

Both seasonal and 2009 H1N1 flu can be dangerous. Most people are sick for only a few days. Some may develop pneumonia. Every year in the U.S., flu causes thousands of hospital admissions and deaths, mostly among the elderly, young children, pregnant women, and in people with chronic medical problems and weakened immune systems. Severe disease from 2009 H1N1 has mostly been seen in people less than 65 years of age.

How is flu spread?

Both seasonal and 2009 H1N1 flu live in the nose and throat and are sprayed into the air when an infected person sneezes, coughs or talks. People nearby can then breathe in the virus. Flu symptoms usually start 1 to 4 days after a person breathes in the virus. Adults with flu can spread it from 1 day before symptoms appear to 5-7 days after.

What should I do if I get the flu?

Bed rest, plenty of fluids and non-aspirin pain relievers help most people feel better. If you are sick with flu-like illness, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommend that you stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone except to get medical care or for other necessities. (Your fever should be gone without the use of a fever-reducing medicine). Keep away from others as much as possible so they don't get sick.

Prescription drugs, called antiviral agents, can be used to prevent or treat the flu. You should talk to your health care provider about taking these drugs. Children and teens with the flu should never take aspirin because a rare but serious disease called Reye's Syndrome can occur in young people who take aspirin when they have the flu.

Can flu be prevented?

Yes. An important way to prevent the flu is by yearly vaccination. Vaccination can result in fewer doctor visits, hospitalizations and deaths for both you and the people around you. Flu viruses change often, so last year's vaccine may not protect you this year.

A flu shot for 2009 H1N1 flu is being produced and will be available in the fall of 2009.

Take these everyday steps to protect your health:

- Avoid or reduce contact with infected persons whenever possible
- Cough or sneeze into your sleeve, not your hands
- Wash hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective
- Avoid touching eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way
- Get an annual flu shot if you are a member or caregiver of a high-risk group

When should I get a flu shot?

The seasonal flu vaccine should be given in September or as early as the vaccine becomes available. The 2009 H1N1 vaccine will be given to priority groups starting sometime fall 2009.

Why do I need to get a flu shot each year?

Flu viruses change all the time. Each year the types of flu viruses included in the vaccine may be altered based on how the virus has changed in the United States and other countries.

Who should get the seasonal flu shot?

Everyone 6 months of age and older should get a flu shot. It is especially important that those listed below get a flu shot every year:

- Children 6 months to 18 years of age, especially those who regularly take aspirin. These people may be at risk of getting Reye's syndrome, a disease that causes coma, liver damage and death
- Everyone 50 years of age or older
- Anyone 19 through 49 years of age who falls into one of the groups below:
 - Residents of long-term care facilities
 - People with heart disease, cystic fibrosis, asthma or other lung disease
 - People with kidney disease, diabetes or other metabolic diseases, sickle cell anemia and other blood disorders
 - People with weakened immune systems (i.e., by cancer treatment or HIV/AIDS)
 - Women who will be pregnant during flu season
 - People with certain muscle or nerve disorders (such as seizure disorders or severe cerebral palsy) that can lead to breathing or swallowing problems
- Anyone who might transmit flu to someone at risk:
 - Everyone who lives with or takes care of children younger than 2 years of age or anyone else on the list above
 - Health care workers
 - Emergency response workers
 - Staff of assisted living residences
 - Home care workers

Who should get the 2009 H1N1 flu shot?

The seasonal flu vaccine is not expected to provide protection against 2009 H1N1 flu. A 2009 H1N1 vaccine is being produced and will be ready in the fall. The first priority groups to receive the new H1N1 vaccine when it becomes available are:

- Pregnant women
- Household contacts and caregivers for children younger than 6 months of age
- All people from 6 months through 24 years of age
- Persons age 25 through 64 years who have health conditions associated with higher risk of medical complications from influenza
- Healthcare and emergency medical services personnel

Later in the fall or early winter, as more vaccine becomes available, these priority groups will expand.

Who should NOT get a flu shot?

Infants younger than 6 months of age and people with a severe allergic (anaphylactic) reaction to eggs or to a previous dose of flu vaccine should not receive a flu shot. People with a history of Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS) should talk to their health care provider.

How safe is the flu shot?

Most people who get a flu shot have no problems. The most common side effect is a sore arm that lasts 1 or 2 days. A few people have mild fever, headache, chills, or muscle aches for 2 days. More serious reactions are rare. The flu shot cannot give you the flu.

**For more information on flu and H1N1,
please visit www.oakgov.com/health or call Oakland County
Health Division's Nurse on Call at 248-858-1406.**

The Oakland County Health Division will not deny participation in its programs based on race, sex, religion, national origin, age or disability. State and federal eligibility requirements apply for certain program.

Hand Washing Instructions:

- Use soap and running water
- Rub your hands vigorously for 20 seconds
- Wash all surfaces, including:
 - Back of hands
 - Wrists
 - Between fingers
 - Under fingernails
- Rinse well
- Dry hands with a paper towel
- Turn off the water using a paper towel instead of bare hands

For more information on Influenza, call (248) 858-1406 or toll free 1 (800) 848-5533.

For additional copies, visit our website at www.oakgov.com/health.