



## Facts About Flu, H1N1 (swine-origin) Flu, & Pandemic Flu

### What is the flu?

Influenza, also called the flu, is a disease caused by the influenza virus. Each year about 5% to 20% of people in the US get the flu, and as many as 35,000 people in the US die each year of flu. People with the flu may have a headache, a fever, a dry cough, a sore throat, a runny/stuffy nose, extreme tiredness, and muscle aches. Children may also have nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea. Most people will feel very sick when they have the flu, but will get better on their own. Some people are at risk for serious flu complications, such as pneumonia.

### How does the flu spread?

The flu virus is spread by droplets that are made when someone with the flu coughs or sneezes. A person can get the flu by breathing in these droplets. A person can also get the flu by touching his or her eyes, nose, or mouth after touching a surface that has the flu virus on it. A person with the flu can give the flu to other people even before he or she has symptoms of the flu.

### How do I keep from getting the flu?

The best way to prevent the flu is to get the flu vaccine each fall. The flu vaccine is especially recommended to people at risk for flu complications. People at risk include those over 50 years old; children 6 to 23 months old; pregnant women; people with certain health conditions (such as heart, lung, kidney, or metabolic diseases, asthma, anemia, seizure disorders, or a weakened immune system) and; people who work or live with someone at risk for complications. The flu virus can change from year to year. That is one reason why you need to get a flu vaccine every year. Another important, and easy, way to protect yourself from the flu is to wash your hands often. Always wash your hands before and after touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Be especially sure to wash your hands before eating. Stay away from people who have the flu. Finally, to stay healthy, eat right, exercise, and get enough sleep.

### What is the best way to wash your hands?

- First, wet your hands and apply soap. (If you use a bar of soap, make sure it is clean, and keep it on a rack so that it dries between uses.)
- Next, rub your hands together and make sure to scrub all parts of your hands and fingers. Do this for 10 - 15 seconds (about as long as it takes to hum a short tune such as 'Happy Birthday' twice).
- Rinse all of the soap off your hands and dry them well.
- If you don't have soap and clean water, use one of the alcohol-based gels (hand sanitizers) to clean your hands. When using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer:
  - Apply the gel to the palm of one hand.
  - Rub the gel over all surfaces of your hands and fingers until they are dry.

### How do I keep from spreading flu to others?

Washing your hands often helps to prevent spreading the flu to others. Another way to prevent spreading the flu is to cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. After coughing or sneezing, put the tissue in the trash. If you don't have a tissue, cover your mouth and nose with your upper arm. Wash your hands after you cough or sneeze. You should also stay home when you are sick.

## What is pandemic flu?

Pandemic flu is a worldwide flu outbreak that occurs when the flu is caused by a new influenza virus that spreads very easily from one person to another, and can make many people very sick. Flu pandemics occurred in 1918, 1957 and 1968. The World Health Organization has stated that the current H1N1 flu strain is now in a pandemic phase.

## What can be done to prevent the spread of pandemic flu when it happens?

The good health habits that will protect against the flu should also help against pandemic flu (see box below). You may also want to consider getting the flu vaccine each year and discussing this option with your doctor. A vaccine is unlikely to be available right away since it takes up to 6 months to develop a vaccine against a new strain of flu virus. Countries around the world are storing medicines that may be able to prevent and treat pandemic flu. In the U.S., there are national, state and local pandemic influenza preparedness plans.

### You can protect yourself, your family, and your community from the flu by:

- Getting a flu vaccine, if it is available to you.
- Practicing good health habits:
  - Wash your hands often.
  - Cover your nose and mouth when you sneeze or cough
  - Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
  - Stay at home when you are sick.
  - Avoid close contact with people who have the flu.
  - Eat right, exercise regularly, and get enough sleep.

## What is swine flu (also called H1N1 flu or swine-origin flu)?

Both animals and humans can get sick from flu. The flu that we are calling swine flu appears to have started in pigs but is now affecting humans.

## Why are people worried about H1N1 (swine-origin) flu?

People are worried because the H1N1 flu has not previously been seen in humans and could cause a pandemic. At this time, there is no vaccine for this type of flu. However, the treatment for this flu is the same as the treatment for other strains of flu virus.

## What can I do to protect against H1N1 (swine-origin) flu?

Swine flu appears to spread like any other flu. Follow the instructions for washing your hands and covering your coughs and sneezes. If you are sick, stay home from work or school. And remember that eating pork or pork products does not cause flu.

## For more information on flu, bird flu and H1N1 (swine-origin) flu go to

<http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/> or <http://pandemicflu.gov>



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