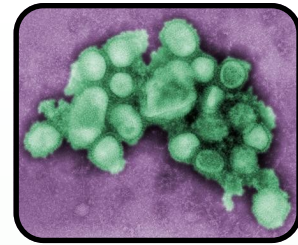


H1N1 or Swine Flu

Frequently Asked Questions

Updated September 2009



What is H1N1 (swine) flu?

H1N1 (referred to as “swine flu” early on) is a new influenza virus causing illness in people. This virus was first detected in people in the United States in April 2009. It is now in countries all over the world. This virus is spreading from person-to-person, in a similar way that regular seasonal influenza viruses spread.

It was announced in June 2009 that H1N1 (swine) flu has reached a pandemic level. What is a pandemic?

A disease epidemic occurs when there are more cases of a disease than would normally be expected in a defined region. A pandemic is a worldwide epidemic of a disease. The H1N1 influenza pandemic has occurred because a new virus emerged that the human population does not have immunity (protection against) and it has spread all over the world. Pandemics can either be mild or severe in the illness and death they cause, and the severity of a pandemic can change over time. At this time, H1N1 is called a pandemic due to the geographical spread of the virus and not due to the severity of illness caused by the virus. The United States continues to report the largest number of cases, however most people that have become ill have recovered without needing medical treatment.

How do I know if I have H1N1 (swine) flu?

The symptoms of H1N1 flu virus are similar to the symptoms of seasonal flu and include fever (usually high), runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills, fatigue, cough, and sore throat. Some people that have been infected with this virus also reported diarrhea and vomiting (most common in children). Due to the fact that H1N1 and the seasonal flu have similar symptoms you may not know which one you have.

Where can I get tested?

The rapid flu test that is often done in doctor’s offices does not test for H1N1 (swine) flu. People that have influenza like symptoms are no longer being tested by the state for H1N1 (swine) unless they need to be hospitalized. The reason for this is because of the extensive spread of novel H1N1 flu within the United States and the fact that current severity and treatment is similar to seasonal flu. A doctor may make an assumptive diagnoses of H1N1 based on your symptoms.

Are there cases in North Carolina? Catawba County?

The H1N1 virus is widespread across the world and our state and county are not exempt. The testing and reporting guidelines have evolved with the situation over the last few months and we are no longer testing and reporting everyone who has symptoms. Since H1N1 is the predominant flu strain that is circulating at this time, anyone who shows flu like symptoms is presumed to have H1N1. Fortunately, most people who have H1N1 symptoms can recover at home. It is quite probable that our county has cases. A health care provider may tell someone that they have H1N1 (swine) flu based on their symptoms and treat them accordingly.



Stay Home if You're Sick

If I know someone who has the virus, how likely is it that I will become sick?

Influenza is spread mainly from person-to-person through coughing or sneezing of infected people. For you to become infected you typically must have 'close contact' with someone who has the virus. Close contact is considered being within 3 to 6 feet of someone. Therefore, someone coughing on the other side of a large room would not put you at high risk. However, some viruses and bacteria can live from 20 minutes up to 8 hours or more on surfaces like doorknobs, desks, and cafeteria tables. Washing your hands often and avoiding touching your face when in public places will go a long way in preventing you from getting the virus.

How long after being around someone with H1N1 (swine) flu could I become sick?

The incubation period for this virus ranges from 1 up to 7 days, with the most people becoming sick within 4 days (the average is 2 days) of being exposed to someone with the virus.

How do I protect myself and my family from this new virus?

There are actions you should take every day to stay healthy.

- 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 often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hands cleaners are also effective.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread that way.



Stay home if you get sick. The Centers for Disease Control recommends that you stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.

Is there a vaccine? When will it be available?

Vaccines are the most powerful tools for controlling influenza. The U.S government is in the process of working closely with vaccine manufacturers to produce a vaccine for this new virus. The novel H1N1 vaccine is expected to be available in the fall (October). Specific dates are not available yet as vaccine availability depends on manufacturing time and the need to conduct clinical trials.

How many vaccines will I need to get this fall?

Unfortunately the seasonal flu vaccine and the H1N1 vaccine will need to be separate shots. You should get the seasonal flu vaccine and the H1N1 vaccine. Some people may need two doses of H1N1 vaccine (initial and a booster 21 days later). Ask your doctor how many H1N1 vaccines you will need. The seasonal flu shot and the H1N1 flu shot(s) protect you from 2 different viruses, so it is important that you take the time to get both. The seasonal vaccine is available now and individuals are encouraged to get this shot as soon as possible.

What do I do if I get sick?

Unless you need medical care, you should stay home and minimize contact with others, including avoiding travel and not going to work or school. If you leave the house to seek medical care, wear a facemask if available, and cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue. The Centers for Disease Control recommends that people with influenza-like illness remain at home until at least 24 hours after they are free of fever (100° F), or signs of a fever without the use of fever-reducing medications. Antiviral drugs can be given to treat those who become severely ill with influenza. These antiviral drugs are prescription medicines (pills, liquid or an inhaler) that help fight against influenza viruses, including novel H1N1. These medications must be prescribed by a health care professional.

Stay informed about the situation as new information is released regularly. Check the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website (<http://www.cdc.gov>) or contact your doctor or Catawba County Public Health:

Phone: 828.695.5800

Website: www.catawbacountync.gov/phealth