

# Facts

from the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment



## H1N1 Influenza (swine flu): questions and answers

### What is novel Influenza A H1N1?

H1N1 is a new flu virus causing illness in people. This new virus was first detected in people in the United States in April 2009. In recent months the virus has been found all over the world. This virus is spreading from person-to-person, probably in much the same way that more common seasonal influenza viruses spread. This virus was first referred to as “swine flu” because testing showed it was similar to flu viruses in North American pigs.

### Are there human infections with novel Influenza A H1N1 in the U.S.?

Yes. Cases of human infection were first confirmed in the U.S. in April. The outbreak has spread through much of the world. CDC believes that more than 1 million people have been infected with the virus. More information about the U.S. and H1N1 is posted at [www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/](http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/). Federal, local and state health agencies are working together on the outbreak, along with the World Health Organization (WHO).

### Is this H1N1 flu virus contagious?

Yes, the new H1N1 virus is contagious and is spreading from human to human. However, at this time, it is not known how easily the virus spreads between people.

### What are the signs of H1N1 flu in people?

The signs and symptoms of this flu virus are similar to those of seasonal flu. They include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Many also have reported diarrhea and vomiting with this flu. Like seasonal flu, severe illnesses and deaths have occurred with this virus.

### How does the novel Influenza A H1N1 flu spread?

Spread of this H1N1 virus is happening in the same way that seasonal flu spreads. Flu viruses are spread mainly from person to person through coughing or sneezing. Sometimes people may become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose. This can be prevented by frequent hand-washing.

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

H1N1 spreads in the same way as seasonal flu viruses. With seasonal flu, studies have shown that people may be contagious

### Be 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 hand cleaners are effective if soap and water are unavailable.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- If you get sick with influenza, stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.

from one day before they appear sick to 7 days after they get sick. Children, especially younger children, might be contagious for longer periods. We are still learning about this new virus.

### Can I get infected with the new H1N1 virus from eating or preparing pork?

No. H1N1 viruses are not spread by food. You cannot get this new H1N1 virus from eating pork or pork products. Eating properly handled and cooked pork products is safe.

### What should I do to keep myself from getting sick?

A new vaccination is in testing now and may be available this fall. There are some simple actions that can help prevent the spread of germs that cause illnesses like flu.

- 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 hand cleaners also help.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- If you are sick, stay home until you have been without a fever for 24 hours, without the use of fever-reducing medicines like acetaminophen or ibuprofen. This is to keep from infecting others and spreading the virus further.

### Are there medicines to treat the H1N1 flu?

Yes. Your doctor might order one of two antiviral medicines, oseltamivir (Tamiflu) or zanamivir (Relenza), for the treatment

and/or prevention of infection with the new H1N1 flu virus. If you get sick, antiviral drugs might make your illness milder and make you feel better faster. They may also prevent serious flu complications. During the current outbreak, people who become very sick with the H1N1 flu and those who are at highest risk for complications from flu are the highest priority for the antiviral medicines. For treatment, antiviral drugs work best if started soon after getting sick, ideally within 2 days of symptoms.

## How long can an infected person spread H1N1 flu to others?

People with H1N1 influenza virus infection should be considered contagious as long as they show signs of being sick and possibly for up to 7 days following the first sickness. Children, especially younger children, might be contagious for longer times.

## How long can flu viruses live on objects such as books and doorknobs?

Studies show that flu viruses can survive on surfaces. They can infect a person for 2 to 8 hours after being deposited on the surface. Frequent handwashing will help you reduce the chance of getting contaminated from common surfaces.

## What is the best way to keep from spreading the virus through coughing or sneezing?

If you are sick, limit your contact with other people as much as possible. Do not go to work or school if you are ill. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing to help protect those around you. Put your used tissue in the waste basket. Cover your cough or sneeze into your arm if you do not have a tissue. Then, clean your hands, and do so every time you cough or sneeze.

## What is the best way to wash my hands to avoid getting the flu?

Washing your hands often will help protect you from germs. Wash with soap and water, or clean with alcohol-based hand cleaner. When you wash your hands with soap and warm water, wash for 15 to 20 seconds. When soap and water are not available, alcohol-based disposable hand wipes or gel sanitizers may be used. If using gel, rub your hands until the gel is dry.



Colorado Department  
of Public Health  
and Environment

## What should I do if I get sick?

If you live in areas where people have H1N1 flu and you become ill with fever, body aches, runny or stuffy nose, sore throat, nausea, vomiting or diarrhea, you should stay home except to go to the doctor. If you are very sick or you are at high risk for flu complications, contact your doctor or health care provider.

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

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish or gray skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Not waking up or not interacting
- Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough
- Seizures (for example, uncontrolled convulsions)

### 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
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough
- Less responsive than normal or becomes confused

## I got my flu shot this year. Will it protect me from H1N1 flu?

The currently available seasonal flu vaccine is unlikely to protect you against H1N1 flu as it is a new flu virus that was not detected early enough to be included in the seasonal flu vaccine.

A seasonal flu shot is the best protection against the seasonal flu. Even if the H1N1 vaccination becomes available this fall, you should also get your regular flu shot.

## Additional sources of information

### Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment

[www.cdph.state.co.us/epr](http://www.cdph.state.co.us/epr)  
303-692-2030  
1-877-518-5608 (toll-free)

### Centers for Disease Control and Prevention U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

[www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu](http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu)  
[www.flu.gov](http://www.flu.gov)  
1-800-311-3435 (toll-free)

08/09