

COASTAL HEALTH DISTRICT

"protecting and advancing the public's health"

2009 Novel H1N1 FAQs Coastal Health District Media Outlets 9.03.09

What are the symptoms of H1N1 flu?

Symptoms are similar to those for seasonal flu. Those symptoms may include:

- Fever over 100° F
- Cough and/or sore throat
- Body aches and headache.
- In addition, fatigue, lack of appetite, runny nose, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea can occur.

How do people catch H1N1?

You can become infected by the H1N1 virus when someone infected with H1N1 coughs or sneezes, releasing droplets carrying the virus near you. You can then take in the virus through your mouth, nose or eyes. You can also get the virus by touching a surface such as a countertop or doorknob that has become contaminated and then touching your mouth, nose or eyes.

How can I avoid getting H1N1 flu?

The best ways to avoid getting the flu, seasonal or novel H1N1, is to practice good personal hygiene which includes:

- Frequent hand washing with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer (including before and after meals/snacks or restroom use, at the end of the school day).
- Covering your cough or sneeze by coughing into the corner of your elbow.
- Throw away a tissue after you use it.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread that way.

How sick are people getting with H1N1?

Fortunately, the illness caused by novel H1N1 flu to date has been mild to moderate in severity and most individuals will recover without any medical treatment.

How long should people with the flu stay home?

People with flu symptoms should keep away from others as much as possible. Do not travel, go to school, go to work, etc. If you have flu-like illness you should stay home for at least 24 hours after the fever is gone without the use of fever-reducing medicine.

What's the difference between the regular flu and novel H1N1 (swine) flu?

The difference is that H1N1 is a new flu strain that's never been seen before.

Will the "regular" (seasonal) flu shot protect me against H1N1?

No. Getting a seasonal flu shot will not protect against novel H1N1 flu; however, because seasonal flu can also cause you to become very sick, we strongly encourage citizens to get a seasonal flu shot.

I think I was around somebody that had swine flu. Could they be contagious?

People infected with seasonal and novel H1N1 flu may be able to infect others from 1 day before getting sick to 5 to 7 days after. This can be longer in some people, especially children and people with weakened immune systems and in people infected with the H1N1 virus.

How long can the H1N1 virus live on a countertop or other surface?

The virus can live on hard surfaces for at least several hours and possibly more than a day. For that reason, it is important that you wash your hands after coughing or sneezing to avoid passing on the virus. To prevent the spread of influenza virus it is important to keep surfaces (especially bedside tables, surfaces in the bathroom, kitchen counters and toys for children) clean by wiping them down with a household disinfectant according to directions on the product label.

Can I get tested for H1N1?

The majority of laboratory testing for novel H1N1 influenza is performed at state public health laboratories and is used primarily for public health surveillance, not for primary diagnosis of individual patients. Often, specific testing for H1N1 does not assist with the diagnosis or treatment of the virus since results frequently require nearly a week turnaround time. Rapid flu testing is available to help determine the TYPE of influenza only (Type A or B), but patients may have H1N1 even if the rapid test is negative. In many cases these tests are not necessary and can be inaccurate. Decisions about rapid flu testing should be left to the treating physician, many of whom follow public health guidelines.

When will the vaccine for H1N1 be available and how can I get it?

The vaccine is not yet available. Once it is available, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommend that certain groups of the population receive the novel H1N1 vaccine first. These groups have been identified as being more susceptible to suffering complications from novel H1N1 flu. The targeted groups for early vaccination include:

- **Pregnant women** because they are at higher risk of complications and can potentially provide protection to infants who cannot be vaccinated.
- **Household contacts and caregivers for children younger than 6 months of age** because younger infants are at higher risk of influenza-related complications and cannot be vaccinated. Vaccination of those in close contact with infants less than 6 months old might help protect infants by “cocooning” them from the virus
- **Healthcare and emergency medical services personnel** because infections among healthcare workers have been reported and this can be a potential source of infection for vulnerable patients. Also, increased absenteeism in this population could reduce healthcare system capacity
- **All people from 6 months through 24 years of age**
 - **Children from 6 months through 18 years of age** because we have seen many cases of novel H1N1 influenza in children and they are in close contact with each other in school and day care settings, which increases the likelihood of disease spread, and
 - **Young adults 19 through 24 years of age** because we have seen many cases of novel H1N1 influenza in these healthy young adults and they often live, work, and study in close proximity, and they are a frequently mobile population
- **Persons aged 25 through 64 years who have health conditions associated with higher risk of medical complications from influenza.**

It is likely that initially the vaccine will be available in limited quantities. Priority groups (within the targeted groups) for initial vaccination are: pregnant women; people who live with or care for children younger than 6 months of age; healthcare and emergency medical services personnel with direct patient contact; children 6 months through 4 years of age; and children 5 through 18 who have chronic medical conditions.

Although we don't yet know when the Coastal Health District will receive an initial shipment of novel H1N1 vaccine, local public health officials are working with a variety of partners to make the vaccine available in a variety of settings. Once details are finalized, the locations for the vaccine will be heavily publicized.

What will the H1N1 vaccine cost?

The federal government is providing the vaccine at no charge. However, in some settings, administration fees will be charged.

Will the H1N1 vaccinations be mandatory?

No. Getting the vaccine is a personal decision; however those in targeted groups for early vaccination are encouraged to get the novel H1N1 vaccine. As more vaccine becomes available, citizens throughout the Coastal Health District are also encouraged to get the novel H1N1 vaccine.

If I get a regular flu shot, will that protect me from swine flu?

No. Novel H1N1 (swine) flu is a new strain of flu and a seasonal flu shot will not protect you. However, because seasonal flu can also cause you to become very sick, we strongly encourage you to get your seasonal flu shot.

Can I get swine flu from eating pork or ham?

No, you cannot get H1N1 flu in that way. H1N1 is passed from person to person through coughing or sneezing, or by touching a surface that an infected person has coughed or sneezed on and then touching your mouth, nose or eyes.