



Patient Education:

# Colds and the Flu | H1N1 Influenza

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**Keyword(s):** swine

flu;h1n1;flu;influenza;fever;pandemic;infections;viruses;colds;pig;seasonal flu;pork;pork products;fever;sore throat;cough;muscle aches;headache;chills;fatigue;runny nose;stuffy nose;nasal congestion;sinusitis;vomiting;emesis;diarrhea;vaccine;flu vaccine;flu shot;flu spray;trouble breathing;shortness of breath;confusion;not drinking enough fluids;trouble waking up;flu-like symptoms;fever combined with a rash;extreme irritability;oseltamivir;zanamivir;anti-viral drugs;tamiflu;acetaminophen;Tylenol;ibuprofen;Advil;Motrin;naproxen;Aleve;aspirin;Reye's syndrome and prevention

**description**    **Learn about the symptoms of and treatments for H1N1 influenza.**

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## H1N1 Influenza

### What is H1N1 influenza?

H1N1 influenza (also known as swine flu) is an infection caused by a virus. H1N1 flu began to occur in the United States in spring 2009. At first, the infection was called swine flu because early tests showed that the virus was like flu viruses that occur in swine (pigs). H1N1 affects humans.

### How is H1N1 flu different from seasonal flu?

H1N1 flu is like the seasonal flu in that both infections are caused by viruses.

H1N1 flu is more common in people younger than age 25. Seasonal flu tends to infect people 65 years of age and older.

H1N1 flu also is active earlier in the year. It began to appear in the spring of 2009. Seasonal flu occurs later in the winter, with December, January and February being peak months.

# Can I catch H1N1 by eating pork?

No, the H1N1 virus is not spread by eating pork or pork products.

# What are the symptoms of H1N1 flu?

Symptoms start 3 to 5 days after you have been exposed to the virus and last about 8 days. Symptoms may include:

- Fever
- Sore throat
- Cough
- Muscle aches
- Headache
- Chills
- Fatigue
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea

A note about vaccines

Sometimes the amount of a certain vaccine cannot keep up with the number of people who need it. [Read here about vaccine shortages.](#)

# Who should get the H1N1 vaccine?

There are 2 types of flu vaccine. The trivalent flu vaccine protects against the 3 strains of flu that are expected to be the most common this flu season. The quadrivalent vaccine protects

against 4 strains. The flu vaccine has protected against H1N1 since 2010, and the 2014-2015 flu shot will also protect against H1N1.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that anyone 6 months of age or older receive the flu vaccine, especially groups at higher risk of complications from flu. These include:

- Pregnant women
- People who live with or take care of children younger than 6 months of age
- People who work in health care or emergency services
- Children and young adults between 6 months and 24 years of age
- People between 25 and 64 years of age who are at risk of having complications from the H1N1 virus, such as people who have weak immune systems or chronic health problems like asthma or heart disease

## Is the vaccine safe?

Yes, the seasonal flu vaccine that also protects against H1N1 is considered very safe. Rarely, some people may have an allergic reaction to the vaccine. Tell your doctor if you have ever had a reaction after receiving a flu vaccine, have had an allergic reaction to chickens or egg protein, or have a fever or illness that is more than "just a cold."

## When should I see my doctor?

If you're not in one of the at-risk groups listed above, your body will probably fight off the virus on its own. If you think you might have H1N1 flu, call your doctor to see whether or not you need to come for an office visit. Signs that the H1N1 flu requires your doctor's attention include:

- Trouble breathing
- Shortness of breath
- Confusion

In children, concerns include:

- Not drinking enough fluids
- Trouble waking up
- Flu-like symptoms that go away and then return with a fever and cough
- Fever combined with a rash
- Extreme irritability that makes the child push away from being held

## How will my doctor know I have H1N1?

Your symptoms alone may alert your doctor that you have H1N1 flu. Most rapid tests can show if you have the flu, but these look for many viruses, not just the H1N1 virus. A test can be done that will show if you have the H1N1 virus specifically, but getting the results takes a few days. Your doctor may want to start treating you right away. That is why many doctors do not bother testing if your symptoms point to H1N1 flu. This is especially true if your community is in the middle of an H1N1 outbreak with lots of people infected.

## If I have H1N1, will I need a prescription to get better?

Most people with the H1N1 flu will get better without needing a prescription. Your doctor may decide that you need a prescription if you are at risk of flu complications, or if:

- You have severe illness or are in the hospital from the flu
- You have the flu and are at risk of having problems from the flu, such as children younger than 2 years old, adults 65 years and older, pregnant women and people who have chronic health problems or weak immune systems
- You have the flu and are having signs of a more serious infection, such as shortness of breath
- You are younger than 19 and are on long-term aspirin therapy

If you have any of these risk factors, your doctor may prescribe an anti-viral drug, such as oseltamivir or zanamivir. Anti-viral drugs decrease the flu virus' ability to reproduce. These drugs can shorten the time you are sick, reduce the severity of the symptoms and prevent problems that the flu can cause. These drugs work best if they are started right at the beginning of flu symptoms.

## What else can I do to feel better?

If you have a fever, you can treat it with medicines that reduce fever. These include medicines such as acetaminophen (one brand name: Tylenol), ibuprofen (some brand names: Advil, Motrin) or naproxen (one brand name: Aleve). These drugs also relieve aches and pains. Never give children or teenagers 18 years or younger aspirin because of the risk of Reye's syndrome. Reye's syndrome is a serious illness that can lead to death.

You should also drink plenty of fluids to stay hydrated and get plenty of rest. Rest helps your body fight infection.

## What else can I do to avoid getting H1N1 flu?

Stop the spread:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
- If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your upper elbow, not your hands.
- Put used tissues in the trash.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.
- Avoid people who are sick.
- Don't share personal items, such as makeup, eating and drinking utensils, or sports or office equipment.
- If you get sick, stay home from work or school, and avoid being around people. Stay home at least 24 hours after your fever breaks.

