

2009 INFLUENZA INFORMATION

What is the “Swine Flu” that I am hearing so much about?

- Several types of respiratory viruses are known to cause common respiratory infections (ranging in severity from the common cold to the flu, croup and pneumonia). One such infection called “seasonal flu” occurs most commonly in the colder months, and is caused by a virus called “influenza virus”.
- Since April 2009, the CDC has noted that a new type of virus, the H1N1 virus, is circulating in many countries, including the US. This viral infection is highly contagious, similar to seasonal flu, spreading from one person to another. This virus is also unusual in that it is causing illness in the warmer months prior to the start of the typical flu season.

How can I prevent myself or my child from developing the different types of flu?

There are some things you can do to keep you and your child healthy:

1. 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 sleeve, not your hands. Put your used tissue in the waste basket right away.
2. Wash hands often with soap and water, especially after coughing or sneezing. If soap and water aren't available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer (e.g. Purell).
3. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth: germs spread this way.
4. Immunize your child against the seasonal flu.
5. Try to avoid direct contact with sick people- it's also important that your child not be exposed to other children who are sick.

What are the typical symptoms of the novel H1N1 influenza virus infection in children?

The symptoms of this new H1N1 flu virus in people are similar to the symptoms of seasonal flu in children, and most commonly include *fever* and *cough*. Other symptoms often include *body aches*, *headache*, *chills*, *fatigue*, *sore throat*, *runny or stuffy nose*. *Diarrhea* and *vomiting* have also been reported.

What should I do if my child shows flu-like symptoms?

If your child has flu-like symptoms, **keep your child home from school or childcare**. Please notify your child's school about the reason for your child's absence from school. Schools are also receiving guidance from public health officials regarding issues related to the flu.

If I am caring for my sick child at home, what measures should I take?

First of all, keep a close watch on your child's symptoms. Specifically, watch the child's fever pattern, breathing, and fluid intake. Here are some other things to do as you care for your sick child at home:

- **Fever control** – fevers (sometimes high) and chills are common symptoms of the flu. Use Acetaminophen (*Tylenol*) or Ibuprofen (*Advil* or *Motrin*) in doses recommended for your child's age and weight.
AVOID Aspirin!
- **Fluids** – Drinking **plenty** of fluids is very important, in view of the fevers and increased mucus production that is associated with flu infections. Cold fluids are usually well tolerated even with mild nausea.
- **Symptomatic relief of sore throat** – Use throat lozenges for older children (>6 years age) or warm salt-water gargles or warm liquids such as warm chicken broth.
- **Relief from nasal congestion**- Have older children blow their noses; suction the nose of younger children by using saline nose drops before you suction. Saline nasal washes are very helpful in relieving congestion.

Over-the-counter cold medicines or combinations of fever and cold medicine are **NOT** recommended for children under the age of 4 years, and generally **NOT** recommended for children over the age of 4 years. You can also contact your health care provider for general guidance; however, specific professional guidance is only possible if your health care provider has the chance to evaluate your child in the office.

How long should my child remain out of school, if they are sick?

In keeping with the current guidelines, it is advised that you keep your child at home until their fever or symptoms of fever are gone AND their fever does not return even if you do not use any fever-reducing medications (e.g. *Tylenol* or *Motrin*) for a period of 24 hours, unless you have been given other specific instructions by your health care provider. Most schools are also following this as a general rule.

If my child falls sick, how can I prevent them from spreading their infection to my other children?

If you or your child gets sick with a flu-like illness, stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them. You can have your child stay/sleep in a separate room so that (s)he does not expose other people in the household. It is important to try and limit contact with others in the household, specifically young children (<5 years of age), pregnant women, or persons with impaired immune systems.

I am hearing a lot about the dangers of this novel H1N1 virus infection- how dangerous is it for my child, (who is otherwise healthy), to get sick with the new H1N1 influenza infection?

Similar to seasonal flu infections each year in the US, most healthy children who have become sick with this virus have recovered without specific treatment. A minority of them have developed complications from the flu, such as secondary bacterial infections. In general, otherwise healthy children **under the age of 2 years** are at somewhat higher risk for complications due to influenza infections, as are children with **chronic medical problems** (see below).

Which children are at highest risk for having complications of the “swine” flu and seasonal flu?

Complications from the influenza infection, especially fatal complications are currently being noted mainly in children who developed added bacterial infections (bacterial infections on top of the flu viral infection) and in children with certain underlying medical conditions, as described below:

- Neurological and neuro-developmental disorders (e.g. developmental delay, cerebral palsy)
- Muscular conditions (e.g. muscular dystrophy)
- Chronic lung disease (e.g. cystic fibrosis, bronchopulmonary dysplasia, moderately severe asthma)
- Conditions that weaken the immune system (HIV, Lupus)
- Diseases requiring long term Aspirin therapy (Kawasaki disease, rheumatoid arthritis)
- Heart disease (e.g. Congenital heart disease, rheumatic valvular disease)
- Metabolic disease (e.g. diabetes)
- Sickle cell disease
- Renal dysfunction
- Malignancy

What kinds of symptoms should I be concerned about?

Call your health care provider for further guidance if any of these occur:

- Your child’s fever returns after being *absent* for a day or more; or there is a significant change in fever pattern. For example, it was 101° Fahrenheit for several days and then it goes up to 103° Fahrenheit.
- Your child’s other symptoms related to the flu return, even after having improved.

Are there any serious symptoms that I should be worried about?

As with other viral infections, severe infections and complications can occur with novel H1N1 flu infections as well as the seasonal flu infection. We recommend that you seek emergency medical care if your child becomes ill and experiences any of the following warning signs:

- Fast breathing (especially in the absence of high fever)
- Trouble breathing
- Change in color (e.g. bluish or gray color of skin or lips)
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Severe or persistent vomiting or not able to keep down fluids
- Long intervals between urinating
- Not waking up or not interacting as usual
- Undue irritability (e.g. your child is so irritable that (s)he does not even want to be held)

Again, seek **emergency medical care** if your child becomes ill and experiences any of these concerning signs.

Is testing for seasonal or swine flu needed?

In many cases, testing is not always accurate, hence it is not recommended - you may talk to your health care provider about this.

Is there treatment for the “swine flu”?

Specific treatment for the “swine flu,” or the seasonal flu, is dependent on many factors such as effectiveness of treatment, pre-existing high risk medical conditions, severity of the illness, or familial risk factors. **An examination by a healthcare provider is necessary in order to determine the need based on risk.**

Where can I get further information on flu and “swine flu”?

There are several websites providing specific and accurate information as well as guidance for concerned parents:

1. CDC website: www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu
2. Video on swine flu infections: http://www.gogeometry.com/swine_flu_h1n1/swine_flu_cdc_symptoms_treat_video.htm
3. The California Department of Public Health website: <http://www.cdph.ca.gov/HealthInfo/discond/Pages/SwineInfluenza.aspx>
4. County Health Department websites (Fresno County Health department: <http://www.co.fresno.ca.us>)

If I have further specific questions, whom can I call?

- If your questions have not yet been answered, and you wish to speak with someone from our health care team, please call our office during business hours. Call 438-2300, option #2.
- Please note that due to the high volume of calls we receive, you may be placed on hold while we finish helping others before you: PLEASE BE PATIENT!
- A physician is on call, from home, after hours, for **emergency concerns**. Please note: we do not have your child’s records available to us after hours.