



Chattanooga-Hamilton County Health Department

Novel H1N1 Flu Fact Sheet

Background

Influenza viruses circulate and cause illness in people each year, usually during winter and spring months (*seasonal flu*). These viruses can change and combine with animal influenza strains (*bird or swine flu*) resulting in a flu strain that has not been identified before. New flu strains can cause widespread illness in humans because most people will not have immunity to it. When a novel or new flu virus affects humans, illness can spread rapidly around the world (*pandemic flu*).

Novel H1N1 Flu

Novel H1N1 Flu (initially called swine flu) is a new virus currently causing illness in people in all 50 states and in many countries around the world. It contains a previously unknown combination of genetic material from swine, avian and human influenza viruses.

The virus was first detected in April 2009 in persons in the United States, Mexico and Canada. The virus has spread from person to person through the coughs and sneezes of infected people; similar to how the seasonal flu spreads. Ill persons can be contagious from one day before they become ill, to 7 days after illness starts.

CDC expects that illness with this flu virus may continue for some time. As a result, you or people around you may become ill. If so, you need to recognize the symptoms and know what to do.

Symptoms of Novel H1N1 Flu

The symptoms are similar to that of regular seasonal flu and include fever, coughing, sore throat, lethargy, headache, and lack of appetite. Other symptoms have included runny nose, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea. Flu prevention measures are the same for both seasonal flu and novel H1N1 flu.

Flu Prevention

- Practice good hand hygiene: wash hands frequently throughout the day. Use soap and water and scrub for 15 to 20 seconds!
- Use alcohol based hand wipes or gel hand sanitizer whenever soap and water are not available for hand washing.
- Remind your children about good hand hygiene as well.
- Cover your coughs/sneezes with either a tissue that you throw away after using, or cough/sneeze into your sleeve.
- If your hands come in contact with the flu virus and then you touch your eyes, nose or mouth, you may become infected with the flu virus. Avoid touching your face (eyes, nose, mouth) unless you have washed your hands first.
- If you are sick, stay home from work, school, or errands unless you are going for medical care. This will help protect others from getting sick.
- Avoid close contact with people that are sick.
- If you are a working parent and have children in day care or school, make a plan for different child care options if your child should become ill or your child's school or daycare were to close.

Vaccination

- Vaccine for novel H1N1 flu is currently being produced and is the best way to prevent novel H1N1 flu.
- Information will be distributed regarding receiving the vaccine when the vaccine becomes available.

- Regular seasonal flu vaccine is also necessary to prevent illness with seasonal flu strains.

Guidance for Persons with Flu

- Avoid contact with others as much as possible, even your own family.
- Ill persons should stay home from work, school and day care until at least 24 hours after fever is gone (without the use of fever-reducing medication), or longer if other significant symptoms are present.
- Healthcare workers may require work exclusion for 7 days or 24 hours after symptoms end, whichever is longer.
- Recovering individuals should continue good respiratory etiquette and hand washing when they return to work or school.
- If you need to seek medical care, wear a face mask if possible and cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue.
- Consult with your medical provider if you are severely ill or have other underlying medical conditions.
- **Seek emergency medical care if you have the following warning signs:**

Child

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing; bluish or gray skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Not waking up or not interacting; so irritable the child does not want to be held

Adult

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion

Both children and adults

- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough

Treatment for Novel H1N1 Flu

- It is expected that most people will recover without needing medical care.
- Persons with severe illness or who are at increased risk of influenza complications should contact their medical provider or seek medical care. There are antiviral medications available that can be prescribed for those that require them. Not everyone who becomes ill will need this medication.

Public Health Actions

The Chattanooga-Hamilton County Health Department engages in tracking of influenza illness on a routine basis year- round. Medical providers in the community report the number of patients that are seen each week with flu-like illness during flu seasons.

This data is monitored for unusual increases in disease, and for identification of the virus strains that are circulating in the community. In addition, the health department is providing disease prevention information to the community to promote healthy habits that will assist to prevent illness spread within our community.

Resources

For additional information please contact your healthcare provider or visit one of the websites below.

CDC Novel H1N1 Flu Information: <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/>

Tennessee Department of Health: <http://health.state.tn.us/H1N1.htm>

Chattanooga-Hamilton County Health Department: <http://health.hamiltontn.org/swineflu.aspx>