



H1N1 Frequently Asked Questions (As of October 15, 2009)



What is 2009 H1N1 (swine flu)?

2009 H1N1, also called “swine flu”, is a new flu virus causing illness in people. This new flu was first detected in people in the United States in April 2009. 2009 H1N1 flu is spreading worldwide, much in the same way that regular seasonal flu spreads.

Why is 2009 H1N1 flu sometimes called “swine flu”?

This flu was originally referred to as “swine flu” because laboratory testing showed that it was very similar to flu viruses that normally occur in pigs in North America. But further study has shown that this new virus is actually from a mixture of pig, bird and human flu strains.

How does 2009 H1N1 flu spread?

The 2009 H1N1 flu is thought to spread in the same way that seasonal flu spreads. Flu viruses mainly spread from person to person through coughing or sneezing by people who have the flu. Sometimes people may become infected by touching something such as a surface or object with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth, eyes or nose.

What are the signs and symptoms of this virus in people?

The symptoms of 2009 H1N1 flu virus in people include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people may have vomiting and diarrhea. People may have the flu and have respiratory symptoms without a fever.

How severe is illness associated with 2009 H1N1 flu virus?

Illness with the 2009 H1N1 flu has ranged from mild to severe. Most people who have been sick have recovered from mild illness without needing medical treatment. However, some people do experience more severe symptoms which can result in hospitalization and sometimes death.

At this time, about 70% of the people who have been hospitalized with the 2009 H1N1 flu in the US have had one or more conditions recognized as “high risk” for serious flu-related complications. This includes pregnancy, diabetes, heart disease, asthma and kidney disease for example.

Can I get infected with 2009 H1N1 virus from eating or preparing pork?

No. 2009 H1N1 flu is not spread by food. You cannot get infected with the flu from eating pork or pork products. Eating properly handled and cooked pork products is safe.

Is there a risk from drinking water?

Tap water that has been treated by conventional disinfection processes does not pose a risk for transmission of the flu. Current drinking water treatment regulations provide a high degree of protection from germs like the flu.

What can I do to protect myself and others from getting sick?

There is no vaccine available right now to protect against 2009 H1N1 flu. However, a 2009 H1N1 vaccine is currently in production and will be ready within the next month or so.

There are everyday actions that help prevent the spread of germs that cause illnesses like the 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 warm water. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub with at least 60% alcohol concentration.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- If you are sick with flu-like illness, it is recommended that you stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone without the use of a fever-reducing medicine. Keep away from others as much as possible to keep from spreading illness.

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

Washing your hands often will help protect you from germs. You should wash your hands with soap and warm water for 15 to 20 seconds. When soap and water are not available, hand sanitizers may be used with at least 60% alcohol concentration.

What should I do if I get sick?

If you are sick with flu-like illness, it is recommended that you stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone without the use of a fever-reducing medicine. Keep away from others as much as possible to keep from spreading illness. Staying at home means that you should not leave your home except to seek medical care. This means avoiding normal activities including work, school, travel, shopping, social events, and public gatherings.

If you have severe illness or you are at high risk for flu complications, contact your health care provider or seek medical care. If you become ill and experience any of the following warning signs, seek emergency medical care:

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

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

Vaccine Information

When will the 2009 H1N1 vaccine be available?

The 2009 H1N1 vaccine is expected to be available starting in October. More specific dates cannot be provided at this time as vaccine availability depends on several factors.

Update October 7, 2009 - The first shipment of H1N1 FluMist nasal spray vaccine has been received.

Will the seasonal flu vaccine also protect against the 2009 H1N1 flu?

The seasonal flu vaccine is not expected to protect against the 2009 H1N1 flu.

Who will be recommended to receive the 2009 H1N1 vaccine?

Some people are at “higher risk” for more severe illness from 2009 H1N1 flu due to their age and medical conditions, These groups are recommended to receive the 2009 H1N1 vaccine when it becomes available as well as certain people who provide care to those at high risk. This includes:

- pregnant women;
- people who live with or care for children younger than 6 months of age;
- healthcare and emergency medical services personnel;
- persons between the ages of 6 months and 24 years old; and
- people aged 25 through 50 years with chronic health disorders or compromised immune systems

The target groups for the H1N1 FluMist nasal spray vaccine are **healthy**:

- children and young people aged 2 through 24 years
- health care workers under age 50 and
- adults who are less than 50 years old and take care of infants under 6 months of age

“**Healthy**,” in this case, means people who have none of the underlying conditions that may increase the chance for complications of a flu infection. This live viral form of the vaccine is not recommended for use in pregnant women nor for those who are suffering from chronic medical conditions or are immunocompromised. (If you are unsure about whether you can receive the H1N1 FluMist nasal spray vaccine or not, please contact your healthcare provider)

Where is H1N1 Flu vaccine available?

The H1N1 FluMist nasal spray vaccine is available through Pima County Health Department walk in vaccination clinics. For locations and times, please check the H1N1 resource website calendar:

http://pimahealth.org/disease/swineflu/h1n1_influenza_arizona.asp

Why are the elderly not recommended to get vaccine first?

Traditionally, adults older than 64 years have been considered high risk for seasonal flu.

However, laboratory tests show that about one-third of these adults may have some protection

against this flu. Far fewer adults in this age group have been diagnosed with 2009 H1N1 flu compared to younger adults which also shows they probably have some protection.

Although this group is not recommended to receive vaccine first, they can still obtain vaccine when it becomes available to the general public after the high risk groups have been vaccinated. Please note that people age 50 and older who do catch 2009 H1N1 virus are at increased risk for complications, just as they are for seasonal flu. If you have severe illness or you are at high risk for flu complications, contact your health care provider or seek medical care.

Will two doses of vaccine be required?

At this time ages 10 and older will need one dose for 2009 H1N1 flu vaccine. Children aged 6 months through 9 years will need 2 doses. These guidelines are from the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

What will be the recommended interval between the first and second dose for children 9 years of age and under?

For planning purposes, you should assume 21-28 days between the first and second vaccination.

Can seasonal vaccine and novel H1N1 vaccine be administered at the same time?

There are two ways to get flu vaccine; as a shot or as a nasal spray. If you receive the shot it can be given at the same visit as any other vaccine. If you receive the nasal spray you can receive any other shot at the same time, but you cannot get another nasal spray vaccine at the same time.

How safe is the H1N1 vaccine? Are there any side effects?

All vaccines are tested on volunteers before they are allowed to be used for the general public. So far the tests for 2009H1N1 vaccine show that it is as safe as seasonal flu vaccine. The side effects of the 2009H1N1 vaccine are expected to be the same as the side effects of seasonal flu vaccines. The most common side effects of flu vaccination are “local” reactions like soreness, redness and swelling at the site, as well as headache, fever, muscle aches and perhaps vomiting. Occasionally, adolescents have fainted (as they do after receiving a variety of vaccinations).

Severe allergic reactions, while rare, may occur and include:

- difficulty breathing
- swelling around the eyes or lips
- hives
- hoarseness
- wheezing
- a rapid heart rate
- dizziness

If any of these symptoms occur seek medical attention right away.

Only non-pregnant individuals without any health issues from 2 years old to 49 years old may receive the FluMist nasal spray vaccine. (If you are unsure about whether you can receive FluMist or not, please contact your healthcare provider) Since the viruses in the FluMist nasal spray vaccine are weakened, side effects, when they occur, are often similar to though less severe than flu symptoms.