



BlueCross BlueShield of Illinois

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Frequently Asked Questions

How Does H1N1 Flu Differ from Seasonal Flu?

Influenza of any kind has the potential to be deadly, and is monitored closely by public health organizations worldwide. The H1N1 (previously called “swine” flu) outbreak is of particular concern because this strain appears to be highly contagious and is spreading rapidly. Also, any time a new strain of the flu develops, it can spread fast because people don’t have a natural immunity, current vaccinations aren’t effective and new vaccines can take months to develop.

While current influenza medications can ease the symptoms and severity of an individual episode, measures at the community, state, country and worldwide levels are being required to contain the spread of the virus. Availability of enough medication and health care resources to treat the number of cases in various regions is another driving factor in the way public health and government officials are responding.

How Can I Tell if I Have H1N1 Flu?

H1N1 flu has symptoms that are similar to seasonal influenza (type A). These symptoms generally include cough, sore throat, fever, chills, headache, fatigue, sometimes nausea and diarrhea. If you have ever had the flu before, you’ll recognize the symptoms right away. However, having flu symptoms does not automatically mean you have H1N1 flu. The only way to know for sure is to complete a lab test.

Am I at Risk of Getting H1N1 Flu?

Because this is a variant strain of influenza A, you should not assume you are immune, even if you have had a flu shot. Everyone is encouraged to take preventive steps to decrease exposure to contagions and prevent spreading the virus to others.

H1N1 flu worsens pre-existing medical conditions in people, so people with already compromised immune systems are at increased risk of dying as a result of contracting the flu and should take extra precautions.

What Ways Might I Be Exposed to H1N1 Flu?

Rumors and myths abound, but you can blame the usual suspects when it comes to passing along the virus. Human-to-human contact is the leading path of infection. The virus can become airborne through coughing and sneezing, and the virus can live for two hours or longer on things an infected person touches, such as door handles, desks, telephones and restaurant tables.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has identified the targeted priority

groups as:

- Pregnant women
- Household contacts and caregivers for children less than 6 months old
- Health care and emergency medical services personnel
- All people from 6 months to 24 years old
- Persons aged 25 through 64 years with health conditions associated with higher risk of medical complications from influenza

When the vaccine is first made available, only the “Targeted Groups” will initially be allowed to receive it. Employees should check with their doctors to determine when the vaccine will be available and if they should receive it.

How Is H1N1 Flu Treated?

It is expected that most people will recover without needing medical care.

As always, if you are concerned about the immediate safety of yourself or a loved one, particularly a small child or very elderly, call or see your physician. Your physician can determine what plan of treatment is warranted.

What Should I Do?

Stay informed! Health officials will provide additional information as it becomes available. Visit the [CDC H1N1 Flu Web site](#). Some tips they provide:

- 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 water, especially after you cough or sneeze. [Alcohol-based hand cleaners](#) are also effective.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- If you are sick with a flu-like illness, stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone, except to get medical care or for other necessities. (Your fever should be gone without the use of fever-reducing medicine.) Keep away from others as much as possible. This is to keep from making others sick.
- If you are sick and sharing a common space with other household members in your home, wear a facemask, if available and tolerable, to help prevent spreading the virus to others.
- Learn more about how to take care of someone who is ill in ["Taking Care of a Sick Person in Your Home."](#)
- Follow public health advice regarding school closures, avoiding crowds, and other social distancing measures.
- If you don't have one yet, consider developing a family emergency plan as a precaution. This should include storing a supply of extra food, medicines, and other essential supplies. Further information can be found in the ["Flu Planning Checklist."](#)

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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