

FAQ's on H1N1 Flu

What is the H1N1 Flu?

H1N1 flu is a respiratory disease, caused by influenza type A, which infects pigs. Until now, it has not normally infected people, and the rare human cases that have occurred have mainly affected people who had direct contact with pigs. However, there are many variations of the flu and the infection is constantly changing. From the latest form, it is clear that it is spreading from person to person – probably through coughing and sneezing.

What is new about this type of H1N1 flu?

The World Health Organization has confirmed that at least some of the human cases are a never-before seen version of the H1N1 strain of influenza type A. H1N1 is the same strain which causes seasonal outbreaks of flu in humans on a regular basis. But this latest version of H1N1 is different: it contains genetic material that is typically found in strains of the virus that affect humans, birds and H1N1. Flu viruses have the ability to swap genetic components with each other, and it seems likely that the new version of H1N1 resulted from a mixing of different versions of the virus, which may usually affect different species, in the same animal host. Pigs provide an excellent 'melting pot' for these viruses to mix and match with each other.

How many H1N1 flu viruses are there?

Like all influenza viruses, H1N1 flu viruses change constantly. Pigs can be infected by avian influenza and human influenza viruses as well as H1N1 influenza viruses. When influenza viruses from different species infect pigs, the viruses can reassort (i.e. swap genes) and new viruses that are a mix of H1N1, human and/or avian influenza viruses can emerge. Over the years, different variations of H1N1 flu viruses have emerged. At this time, there are four main influenza type A virus subtypes that have been isolated in pigs: H1N1, H1N2, H3N2, and H3N1. However, most of the recently isolated influenza viruses from pigs have been H1N1 viruses.

How dangerous is it?

Symptoms of H1N1 flu in humans appear to be similar to those produced by standard, seasonal flu. These include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, chills and fatigue. Most cases so far reported around the world appear to be mild.

How does H1N1 flu spread?

Spread of this H1N1 influenza A (H1N1) virus is thought to be happening in the same way that seasonal flu spreads. Flu viruses are spread mainly from person to person through coughing or sneezing of people with influenza. Sometimes people may become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose.

What should I do to stay safe?

Anyone with flu-like symptoms who might have been in contact with the H1N1 virus should seek medical advice. But patients are being asked not to go into GP surgeries in order to minimize the risk of spreading the disease to others. Instead, they should stay at home and call their

healthcare provider for advice.

How can someone with the flu infect someone else?

Infected people may be able to infect others beginning 1 day before symptoms develop and up to 7 or more days after becoming sick. That means that you may be able to pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick.

How long can an infected person spread H1N1 flu to others?

People with H1N1 influenza virus infection should be considered potentially contagious as long as they are symptomatic and possible for up to 7 days following illness onset. Children, especially younger children, might potentially be contagious for longer periods.

What measures can I take to prevent infection?

- Avoid close contact with people who appear unwell and who have fever and cough.
- General infection control practices and good hygiene can help reduce transmission of all viruses
 - Cover your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing
 - Use a tissue when possible and dispose it promptly.
- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water to reduce the spread of the virus from your hands to face or to other people
- Clean hard surfaces like door handles frequently using a normal cleaning product.
- If you are rooming with or are caring for someone with a flu-like illness, a mask can be worn to cover the nose and mouth to reduce the risk of transmission. However, experts say there is no scientific evidence to support more general wearing of masks to guard against infections.
- Try to stay in good general health
 - Get plenty of sleep
 - Be physically active
 - Manage your stress
 - Drink plenty of fluids
 - Eat nutritious food
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.

Is it safe to eat pig meat?

Yes. There is no evidence that H1N1 flu can be transmitted through eating meat from infected animals. Nevertheless, it is essential that the meat has been cooked well (a temperature of 70C or 158F would be sure to kill the virus).

Can it be treated?

The two drugs commonly used to treat flu, Tamiflu and Relenza, seem to be effective at treating cases that have occurred so far. However, the drugs must be administered at an early stage to be effective. Use of these drugs may also make it less likely that infected people will pass the virus on to others. It is unclear how effective currently available flu vaccines would be at offering

protection against the new strain, as it is genetically distinct from other flu strains. A new vaccine is being developed, but it may take some time to perfect it.

I had a flu vaccine this season. Am I protected against H1N1 flu?

No. This season's flu vaccine wasn't made with the new H1N1 flu virus in mind; no one saw this virus coming ahead of time. If you were vaccinated against flu last fall or winter, that vaccination will go a long way toward protecting you against certain human flu virus strains. But the new H1N1 flu virus is a whole other problem.

What should I do if I have returned from a country affected by H1N1 influenza?

If you have recently visited one of the countries or areas where human cases of influenza have been identified, it is important for you to monitor your health closely for seven days after your visit to the affected area. There is no need for you to isolate yourself from other people as long as you remain well. If during this period you develop a feverish illness accompanied by one or more of cough, sore throat, headache and muscle aches, you should contact your GP by phone. You should make sure that you tell those from whom you are seeking advice about your recent travel to an area affected. Depending on your symptoms you may be advised that further investigations may be necessary. If further investigations are felt to be needed you will be advised on appropriate arrangements for you to be tested. This may include admission to hospital. For most cases however, you will be well enough to remain at home. It is important you avoid contact with other people as much as possible until the results of your tests are back.

How long can viruses live outside the body?

We know that some viruses and bacteria can live 2 hours or longer on surfaces like cafeteria tables, doorknobs, and desks. Frequent hand washing will help you reduce the chance of getting contamination from these common surfaces.

What is the best way to keep from spreading the virus through coughing or sneezing?

If you are sick, limit your contact with other people as much as possible. Do not go to work or school if ill. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. It may prevent those around you from getting sick. Put your used tissue in the waste basket promptly. Cover your cough or sneeze if you do not have a tissue. Then, clean your hands, and do so every time you cough or sneeze.

How serious is H1N1 flu infection?

Like seasonal flu, H1N1 flu in humans can vary in severity from mild to severe. Between 2005 until January 2009, 12 human cases of H1N1 flu were detected in the U.S. with no deaths occurring. However, H1N1 flu infection can be serious. In September 1988, a previously healthy 32-year-old pregnant woman in Wisconsin was hospitalized for pneumonia after being infected with H1N1 flu and died 8 days later. A H1N1 flu outbreak in Fort Dix, New Jersey occurred in 1976 that caused more than 200 cases with serious illness in several people and one death.

How can human infections with H1N1 influenza be diagnosed?

To diagnose H1N1 influenza A infection, a respiratory specimen would generally need to be collected within the first 4 to 5 days of illness (when an infected person is most likely to be shedding virus). However, some persons, especially children, may shed virus for 10 days or longer. Identification as a H1N1 flu influenza A virus requires sending the specimen to CDC for laboratory testing.

What other examples of H1N1 flu outbreaks are there?

Probably the most well known is an outbreak of H1N1 flu among soldiers in Fort Dix, New Jersey in 1976. The virus caused disease with x-ray evidence of pneumonia in at least 4 soldiers and 1 death; all of these patients had previously been healthy. The virus was transmitted to close contacts in a basic training environment, with limited transmission outside the basic training group. The virus is thought to have circulated for a month and disappeared. The source of the virus, the exact time of its introduction into Fort Dix, and factors limiting its spread and duration are unknown. The Fort Dix outbreak may have been caused by introduction of an animal virus into a stressed human population in close contact in crowded facilities during the winter.

Is the H1N1 H1N1 flu virus the same as human H1N1 viruses?

No. The H1N1 H1N1 flu viruses are antigenically very different from human H1N1 viruses and, therefore, vaccines for human seasonal flu would not provide protection from H1N1 H1N1 flu viruses.

What national measures are being taken?

- CDC's Division of the Strategic National Stockpile (SNS) is releasing one-quarter of its antiviral drugs, personal protective equipment, and respiratory protection devices to help states respond to the outbreak. The Division of Strategic National Stockpile has begun pro-rata deployment of the first 25% of SNS held antiviral drugs and other materials to all 50 states and U.S. territories. This includes:
 - o approximately 11 million antiviral regimens
 - o masks, N95 respirators, Gowns, Gloves and face shields