

Novel H1N1 Influenza

What is novel H1N1 influenza?

Novel H1N1 influenza (formerly known as swine flu) is a contagious acute respiratory disease caused by a new type A influenza virus. In most people, the symptoms and severity are similar to seasonal flu.

Why is novel H1N1 influenza sometimes called “swine flu”?

This virus was originally referred to as “swine flu” because laboratory testing showed that many of the genes in this new virus were very similar to influenza viruses that normally occur in pigs (swine) in North America. But further study has shown that this new virus is very different from the virus that is normally found in pigs.

What are the symptoms of novel H1N1 flu in humans?

The symptoms of novel H1N1 flu are similar to the symptoms of regular seasonal influenza and include fever, cough, sore throat, stuffy nose, and body aches. Some people with novel H1N1 flu have reported vomiting and diarrhea.

What is a pandemic?

The term pandemic means that a contagious disease has spread around the world. It has nothing to do with the severity of the illness. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the outbreak of novel H1N1 flu a pandemic in June 2009. With this declaration comes some further planning and response actions by WHO, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other entities, but it does not indicate any change in the disease itself.

How does novel H1N1 flu spread?

The transmission of novel H1N1 flu is thought to occur in the same way as seasonal flu occurs, which is mainly through person-to-person transmission through coughing or sneezing of

people infected with the influenza virus. Sometimes people may become infected by touching something, such as a surface or object, with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose.

How long is someone with novel H1N1 flu infectious to others?

People with novel H1N1 flu virus infection should be considered potentially contagious one day before the onset of symptoms and as long as they are symptomatic, and possibly up to 7 days following the onset of illness. Children, especially younger children, might be contagious for longer periods.

Can people catch novel H1N1 flu from eating pork?

No. Novel H1N1 flu viruses are not transmitted by food. You cannot get novel H1N1 flu from eating pork or pork products. Eating properly handled and cooked pork and pork products is safe.

How serious is novel H1N1 flu infection?

Like seasonal flu, novel H1N1 flu in people can vary in severity from mild to severe. In some people, novel H1N1 infection can be very serious, causing complications such as pneumonia. Most people who have been sick with novel H1N1 flu have recovered without needing medical treatment. There are some groups that are at greater risk for complications from this flu. These groups include pregnant women, people with underlying chronic diseases (asthma, heart disease, neurological diseases, and others), and people with weakened immune systems.

What medications are available to treat novel H1N1 flu infections in humans?

There are antiviral drugs available that can treat novel H1N1. These are prescription medications

(pills, liquid, or an inhaler) that fight against the flu by keeping flu viruses from reproducing in your body. These medicines, however, are not appropriate for everyone, so it is important that if you are ill you contact your healthcare provider. Currently, these medications are recommended only for the prevention of serious flu complications in people with underlying conditions and for people who are severely ill.

How can human infections with novel H1N1 flu be diagnosed?

To diagnose novel H1N1 flu A infection, a respiratory specimen would need to be collected. If you have severe illness or you are at high risk for flu complications, contact your health care provider or seek medical care. Your health care provider will determine whether flu testing or treatment is needed.

What can I do to protect myself from getting sick?

While there is no vaccine currently available to protect against novel H1N1 flu, there is a vaccine in production. There are also a number of daily actions you can take to help prevent the spread of germs that cause respiratory illnesses such as influenza:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially every time after you cough or sneeze and before you eat or touch you face.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people
- Avoid sharing eating utensils.
- If you get sick with influenza, stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them. Call your healthcare provider if your symptoms are severe.

How long should I stay home if I do become sick with the flu?

No matter what flu you have (novel H1N1 or seasonal flu), you should stay home from work, school, or other activities from the onset of symptoms until at least 24 hours after fever is

gone without the use of fever-reducing medications (acetaminophen, ibuprofen, and others). Although people may shed novel H1N1 flu virus for longer, the peak shedding is during the time of fever. Therefore, as long as people continue to be careful about hand hygiene and cough etiquette, they may return to their activities 24 hours after fever is gone.

For questions about novel H1N1 influenza, call the DHHS Communicable Disease Control Section at 1-603-271-4496 or 1-800-852-3345 x4496. For further information refer to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at www.cdc.gov/H1N1flu, call the CDC information line at 1-800-CDC-INFO, visit the World Health Organization website at www.who.int, or go to the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services website at www.dhhs.state.nh.gov.