

Novel H1N1 Survival Guide

Flu and You...Protecting EIU

What Is It?

Novel H1N1 is a new flu virus of swine origin that infected people in Mexico and the United States in March and April and then spread to become a worldwide pandemic. This is not the same as the Seasonal flu that circulates each year in the late fall and winter in the United States. The novel H1N1 virus spreads easily and is affecting younger people disproportionately. It has persisted during the summer months. Novel H1N1 virus has the potential to cause severe disease and death. There is no vaccine available for the virus yet, but vaccine trials are underway and the vaccine may be available to certain groups as early as mid-October.

Symptoms

According to the [Centers for Disease Control Web site](#), the symptoms of the H1N1 virus include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people with the virus have reported diarrhea and vomiting. If you feel any of these symptoms, contact Health Service (for students 217-581-2727) or your doctor.

How Does It Spread?

H1N1 flu is thought to spread in the same way that regular seasonal influenza viruses spread -- mainly through the coughs and sneezes of people who are sick. But it may also be spread by touching objects that are carrying the virus and then touching your nose or mouth. While the H1N1 virus has sickened tens of thousands of people and closed summer camps in a season when there should be little flu activity, it has killed far fewer than the 36,000 Americans who die from seasonal influenza each year. Most people who have had the disease have only had mild symptoms and have recovered without needing medications.

What to Do If You Get It

Contact your doctor or healthcare provider if you experience flu-like symptoms, especially shortness of breath or a fever higher than 101 degrees. Individuals with severe symptoms may be tested to see if they have the novel H1N1 virus. If diagnosed with the H1N1 virus, your doctor or healthcare provider may prescribe the antiviral medications Tamiflu or Relenza. You will need to stay home until you finish the treatment. The CDC says those with mild symptoms should remain home and self-isolate until you have been without fever for 24 hours.

Going to the Hospital

Unless you have an underlying medical condition, you should not visit the emergency room if all you have is a slight fever and mild headache or other mild flu symptoms. The emergency room can be a source of exposure to other infections. People with mild symptoms should remain at home and self-isolate until they have been fever-free for 24 hours.

Vaccine

This year it is more important than ever for people to get the Seasonal flu vaccine to stay as healthy as possible. However, the Seasonal flu vaccine will not protect against novel H1N1

virus. People will need to be vaccinated against both viruses to be protected. And although everyone is susceptible to novel H1N1 virus, it seems to affect children, young adults and pregnant women most. These groups, in addition to healthcare and childcare providers will be first to receive the H1N1 vaccine when it becomes available. College students are included in this group. Young adults are especially susceptible as they have never seen this virus before and have no existing antibodies. Pregnant women definitely should get vaccinated against H1N1, as the virus can affect unborn babies. Deaths in the U.S. have been higher in pregnant women than in other groups.

Flu in the Schools and the Workplace

The government is urging school districts and colleges and universities not to close down as the flu spreads in the fall. But children with symptoms should be kept home from school. If a child is healthy it is OK to send him or her to school, as long as infected children are not at school. The same goes for working adults and university students. Healthy people should continue their normal activities, but those people with flu symptoms should remain home and self-isolate until they have been fever-free for 24 hours. If someone does need to see a healthcare provider and medication is prescribed, they should not return to work until all medication has been taken. If the flu season becomes severe, colleges and universities may need to consider other measures such as distance learning and social distancing.

Masks

There is no need for healthy people to wear masks to work or classes. You may have seen many pictures of people wearing masks in order to protect themselves from the H1N1 virus. However, most masks become ineffective the minute they become moist, which happens rather quickly. However, if a student living in a Residence Hall displays symptoms consistent with influenza, a Resident Assistant may give them a mask to wear if they need to come to Health Service for evaluation. Additionally, staff in the Health Service may need to wear masks that are more protective if we begin seeing more cases of flu on our campus.

Hand-washing

Hand-washing remains one of the most effective ways to prevent infections. Washing your hands often will help you avoid getting the H1N1 virus. We recommend hand washing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds after touching objects, surfaces or another person's hands.

Hand Sanitizers

Use alcohol-based liquid hand sanitizers frequently when water isn't available or when washing hands is not possible. If using a gel, rub your hands until the gel is dry. Sanitizers do not require water to work; the alcohol in them kills germs.

Everyone is Responsible

Spread the word and tell everyone about taking precautions against cold and flu, not just novel H1N1.