

H1N1 Flu and Children

Q: Is there a H1N1 flu outbreak?

A: There is a confirmed outbreak of H1N1 influenza in the United States and several other countries throughout the world. There is a growing number of confirmed cases in numerous states, including Iowa. There have also been fatal cases in Mexico. There is expected to be more positive cases found throughout the country as testing increases.

Q: Should I be concerned?

A: This is a “novel” and new strain and the best available protection against the seasonal flu, a vaccination, is not available. In addition, none of us has any immunity from previous exposures.

Q: What is the difference between H1N1 flu and the regular seasonal flu?

A: H1N1 flu will show similar symptoms to seasonal flu, such as cough, fatigue, loss of appetite, muscle aches, nausea and vomiting. H1N1 flu will also result in a fever greater than 100 degrees F. Seasonal and H1N1 flu are completely different strains of the influenza virus.

Q: Who is at risk for H1N1 flu?

A: Anyone. A person who has these symptoms AND has traveled to Mexico or an area with a confirmed case in the last 1-7 days may have H1N1 flu. Given how far this has spread, and the lack of any collective immunity, all of us are at risk.

Q: Are children more at risk?

A: Young children may be at risk for more serious complications. They may not have typical symptoms, but may have difficulty breathing and low activity. Little is known about how H1N1 may affect children. However, we think the infection may be similar to other flu infections. Typically, flu infections cause mild disease in children, but children under 5 years old are more likely to have serious illness than older children. Although rare, severe respiratory illness (pneumonia) and deaths have been reported with flu infections in children. Flu infections tend to be more severe in children with chronic medical conditions.

Q: What should I do if myself or a family member is experiencing these symptoms?

A: If you are experiencing flu-like symptoms AND have traveled to Mexico or one of the states with a confirmed case in the last 1-7 days you should CALL your physician or the health department to make arrangements to be tested for H1N1 flu. Do not go to a clinic or emergency room waiting area as you may still be contagious and pass the germ to others in the waiting area.

Q: Does the flu shot I got this year protect against H1N1 flu?

A: The flu shot is the best protection against seasonal influenza but H1N1 flu is a different strain than seasonal flu, therefore the flu shot will not protect against H1N1 flu.

Q: Should I start taking antivirals or have them on hand?

A: No. Antivirals can be used to treat individuals who are already sick with H1N1 flu but they are not recommended for use as a prevention strategy. Physicians will not fill a prescription for antivirals unless you are a suspected case of H1N1 flu.

Q: How can I avoid getting H1N1 flu?

A: Take the same precautions that you would if you were preventing seasonal flu. Avoid contact with sick people; wash hands frequently; avoid touching your mouth, nose or eyes; try to stay in good general health by getting plenty of sleep, being physically active, managing stress, drinking fluids and eating nutritious foods.

Q: Should I avoid travel to the areas where there are confirmed cases?

A: At this time there are no travel restrictions to areas where H1N1 flu has been confirmed. Take precautions by avoiding people who are sick and washing hands often. Check the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and World Health Organization website for travel recommendations,

Q: Can I get H1N1 flu by eating or preparing pork?

A: No. H1N1 flu is transmitted from person to person through coughing, sneezing and close contact of an infected individual.

Q: Is there treatment for H1N1 flu?

A: Yes. There are two different types of antiviral medications that are effective for the treatment of H1N1 flu. Antiviral drugs are prescription medicines that fight against the flu by keeping flu viruses from reproducing in your body. If you get sick, antiviral drugs can make your illness milder and make you feel better faster. They may also prevent serious flu complications. For treatment, antiviral drugs work best if started soon after getting sick (within two days of symptoms). Antivirals are only available from a doctor.

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