

H1N1: What you need to know

People around the world have recently gotten a new type of flu called novel H1N1. (It used to be called swine flu.) You might wonder if you are at risk and how you can protect your health.

Here are answers from health officials to some of the most common questions about the disease:

Q. What is novel H1N1 flu?

A. This is a new type of flu that affects the lungs of people. It was once known as swine flu because scientists thought it was the same type of flu that can affect pigs in North America. But now they know it's not.

How does it spread?

Right now novel H1N1 flu seems to spread like regular flu: through the coughs and sneezes of people who have it.

What are the signs?

If you have novel H1N1 flu, you may:

- Have a fever
- Cough
- Have a runny or stuffy nose
- Have a sore throat
- Feel sick to your stomach or vomit
- Have diarrhea.

Can you get it from eating food?

No. It is not spread by food, and you can't become infected by eating pork or pork products.

How can I protect myself?

Wash your hands often in soap and water. If you don't have soap and water, use hand wipes or cleansing gel. Also:

Get plenty of sleep and exercise.

Drink lots of fluids, and eat healthy foods.

Try not to touch your mouth, nose or eyes. If you must do that, wash your hands first.

Try not to be around sick people.

Currently, no vaccine is available to prevent novel H1N1 flu.

Can it be treated?

Yes. Prescription medicines may help treat this flu. If you get sick, the medicines can make the illness milder. They can also help you get better faster. The drugs work best if you start taking them within two days of having signs of the flu.

What should I do if I get sick?

Call your provider. Also:

- Stay home from work or school.
- Stay away from other people when you can.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
- Throw used tissues in the trash.
- Wash your hands with soap and water often.
- Rest and drink plenty of liquids.

Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; World Health Organization

Some people at higher risk

Certain people are at a higher risk for complications from any kind of the flu. . If you are one of these people you need to get a seasonal (regular) flu shot.

Some high risk factors are:

- Age – risk increases for those age 50 and older
- Diabetes
- Asthma
- Congestive heart failure
- Conditions affecting the heart, lungs or kidneys
- A weakened immune system.

If you are in any of these high-risk groups, get a flu shot at the beginning of the flu season. This is usually late October or early November.

Remember, the seasonal flu shot does not protect against H1N1 flu.