



H1N1 Influenza A (Human Swine Flu)

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is swine flu and human swine flu?

Swine flu and human swine flu are some of the names used in the media for a new strain of influenza virus - H1N1 Influenza A (new variant) - that contains bits of viruses from birds, pigs, and humans. People with H1N1 influenza A (new variant) experience many of the same symptoms as people with regular seasonal influenza.

How severe is H1N1 influenza A?

The majority of cases of H1N1 influenza A reported in Canada and the United States have been mild. Some of the cases reported in Mexico have been more severe, generally involving healthy young people who rapidly progressed from mild illness to severe respiratory distress. Some illnesses have resulted in death. The Public Health Agency of Canada has been working with the World Health Organization, and Mexican and American health officials to determine why cases in Mexico appear to be more severe.

What are the symptoms for H1N1 influenza A in people?

The symptoms of H1N1 flu virus in people are similar to the symptoms of regular human flu and include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people have reported diarrhea and vomiting associated with H1N1 flu. In the past, severe illness (pneumonia and respiratory failure) and deaths have been reported with H1N1 flu virus infection in people. Like seasonal flu, swine flu may cause a worsening of underlying chronic medical conditions.

How is H1N1 influenza A spread?

Spread of the H1N1 flu virus is thought to be happening in the same way that seasonal flu spreads – mainly from person to person via the respiratory route. Coughs and sneezes release the germs into the air where they can be breathed in by other people. Germs can also rest on hard surfaces like counters and door knobs, where they can be picked up on hands and transmitted to the respiratory system when a person touches their mouth or nose. Infected people may be able to infect others beginning 1 day before symptoms develop and up to 7 or more days after becoming sick. Children, especially younger children, might potentially be contagious for longer periods.

What should I do if I've been to an area where H1N1 influenza A has been reported and I have symptoms of a respiratory illness?

If you have recently travelled to an area affected by H1N1 influenza A (new variant) and are feeling ill enough that you need to seek medical attention, be sure to call ahead to discuss your symptoms and travel history. If symptoms require you to go to a physician's office, a hospital, or urgent care clinic, be sure to tell them immediately that you have travelled recently to an area where H1N1 influenza A (new variant) has occurred. A travel history alone does not warrant seeking medical care if you do not feel ill or only mildly ill.

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What should I do if I've been in contact with a confirmed case of H1N1 influenza A (new variant) and I have symptoms of a respiratory illness?

If you have been in contact with a confirmed case of H1N1 influenza A (new variant) and are feeling ill enough that you need to seek medical attention, be sure to call ahead to discuss your symptoms and travel history. If symptoms require you to go to a physician's office, a hospital, or urgent care clinic, be sure to tell them immediately of your contact with a confirmed case of H1N1 influenza A (new variant). Otherwise, if your symptoms are mild, stay home to rest and recover.

How can I avoid getting the flu?

You can decrease your risk of getting the flu by taking regular measures to prevent the spread of any infectious disease:

- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue or the inside of your elbow.
- Properly wash your hands as frequently as possible, for at least 20 seconds every time you wash them.
- Stay home when you are sick until the day after all of your symptoms are gone.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with your hands.

How long can H1N1 influenza A live outside the body?

The virus can live outside the body on hard surfaces for hours but is easily killed by handwashing with warm water or hand sanitizer. That's why proper handwashing and hand hygiene are critical. Household disinfectants will kill the virus on household items and surfaces.

Is there treatment for H1N1 influenza A?

Antiviral medications are currently only being used to treat severe H1N1 influenza A cases or groups who are at high risk for complications. Treatment should be started within two days of symptom onset. Mild illness does not require treatment. Treatment of contacts (the people who come in contact with people who have H1N1 influenza A) is not suggested at this time.

Is there a vaccine for H1N1 influenza A?

No, there is currently no vaccine available for H1N1 influenza A (new variant). Once this strain has been characterized, it may take up to 6 months for an effective vaccine to be developed and tested. Health Canada has a contract with a vaccine manufacturer for vaccine production in the event of a pandemic. The contract covers the production of enough pandemic vaccine for all Canadians.

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What should I do if someone I know is coming from an area affected by H1N1 influenza A?

There are no restrictions, requirements for quarantine, or any need to keep away from work, schools, or public places for individuals travelling from areas where H1N1 influenza A has been detected if that person is not ill. If someone coming from an affected area becomes ill with signs and symptoms of H1N1 influenza A, they should isolate themselves at home. If they require medical attention, be sure to call ahead to discuss their symptoms and travel history. If symptoms require them to go to a hospital or urgent care clinic, tell the hospital or clinic immediately that the person has recently come from an area where H1N1 influenza A has occurred.

Should I travel to Mexico or one of the other areas affected by H1N1 influenza A?

The federal government, through the Public Health Agency of Canada and Foreign Affairs, is responsible for issuing travel advice to Canadians. Travel advisories can be found online at the Public Health Agency of Canada's website: www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/tmppmv/pub-eng.php. Although travel restrictions are unlikely to control this infection in population, people may wish to make individual decisions about avoiding areas where infections are known to exist and where they may not have access medical care.

Can I get H1N1 influenza A from pigs?

Influenza viruses can be transmitted among species. While the potential exists for people to become infected with this virus from pigs, it can only occur in close proximity – such as a swine production barn and slaughterhouse – and there are precautions that can be taken to minimize the likelihood of this transmission.

Can I get H1N1 influenza A from eating pork?

No. Properly cooking pork destroys the virus, if it was present in the pork to begin with.

Where can I get specific information on H1N1 influenza A and the outbreak?

Public Health Agency of Canada

<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/index-eng.php>

Centres for Disease Control and Prevention

<http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/>

World Health Organization

<http://www.who.int/csr/don/en/>

Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care

<http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/providers/program/emu/ihn.html>

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