

Novel H1N1 Flu (aka “Swine Flu”)

What is novel H1N1 flu?

Novel H1N1 is a new influenza virus causing illness in people. This virus was first detected in people in the United States in April 2009 and is now found worldwide.

What do the letters and numbers mean?

Novel H1N1 is just one of many types of flu viruses. There are three “types” of influenza viruses--A, B, and C. Novel H1N1 flu virus is an influenza A type virus. Influenza A viruses can be further characterized by their “subtype.” The “subtypes” are based on the types of proteins that cover the surface of the virus: H (hemagglutinin) and N (neuraminidase). Among influenza A viruses, 16 different subtypes of the H protein and 9 different subtypes of N protein exist, such as H1N1, H3N2, etc.

How is the novel H1N1 flu transmitted?

The novel H1N1 flu virus spreads primarily from person-to-person much in the same way that regular seasonal flu virus spreads (i.e., coughing, sneezing, touching contaminated surfaces and then your eyes/mouth, etc.). As a result, you or people around you may become ill.

What are the signs and symptoms of flu in humans?

The symptoms of the novel H1N1 flu infection in people are similar to those for seasonal flu. Symptoms can include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Occasionally people report nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea. Like seasonal flu, severe illnesses and deaths have occurred as a result of illness associated with the novel H1N1 virus. It is expected that most people will recover without needing medical care. However, if you have severe illness or you are in a group at high risk for flu complications (e.g., pregnant, elderly, chronic medical condition, and infants) contact your health care provider.

Can I get infected with novel H1N1 virus from eating or preparing pork?

No. The nickname “swine flu” is misleading. You cannot get novel H1N1 flu from eating pork or pork products as this virus is not transmitted through food.

What can I do to protect myself from getting the flu?

For Minnesotans, seasonal flu activity generally occurs from November through March. The pattern to be expected for

novel H1N1 flu infections is less clear. Vaccines are the best tool we have to prevent flu. People should continue to get vaccinated against seasonal flu. The routine seasonal flu vaccines will not protect against the novel H1N1 virus, meaning a second flu vaccine for the novel H1N1 flu will most likely be needed. A vaccine for novel H1N1 flu is expected to be available in the fall. Contact your healthcare provider with questions or concerns.

What are other steps I can take to prevent the flu?

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Safely dispose of the tissue in the trash after you use it. If you don't have a tissue, use the inside of your elbow instead of your hands to cover your nose and mouth.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- Stay home if you are sick and until you are fever-free for 24 hours. This is to keep from infecting others and spreading the virus further.

Novel H1N1 Flu information excerpted from CDC and Minnesota Department of Health

US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website: <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/>

Recursos en Español están accesible aquí:
<http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/espanol/>
Phone: 1-800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636)

Minnesota Department of Health:
<http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/idepc/diseases/flu/h1n1/index.html> Phone: 651-201-5414

National Pork Board: <http://www.pork.org/>
Phone: 1-800-456-PORK (800-456-7675)

For clarification of information present on this fact sheet e-mail CAFHS@umn.edu Updated: 08/25/09