

What to Do if You Get Sick: 2009 H1N1 and Seasonal Flu

1. How Do I Know if I Have the Flu?

2009 H1N1 flu virus infection can cause a wide range of symptoms, usually a sudden onset of illness, including fever / chills, significant headache, body aches, cough, runny or stuffy nose, sore throat and fatigue. Some people also have vomiting and diarrhea. A fever may not always be present. Like seasonal flu, 2009 H1N1 flu can range in severity from mild to severe.

2. What Should I do if I Get Sick?

If you get sick with flu-like symptoms, you should stay home and avoid contact with other people except to get medical care. Most people with 2009 H1N1 flu have had a mild illness and have not needed medical care or antiviral drugs. The same is true of seasonal flu. However, some people are more likely to get flu complications, including:

- Children younger than 5, but especially children younger than 2 years old
- Pregnant women
- People who have: Cancer; Blood disorders, including sickle cell disease; Chronic lung disease, including asthma or COPD; Diabetes; Heart disease; Kidney disorders; Liver disorders; Neurological disorders; Neuromuscular disorders, including muscular dystrophy and multiple sclerosis; Weakened immune systems, including people with HIV

Because it is also possible for healthy people to develop more severe illness from the flu, anyone concerned about their illness should consult with their health care provider.

3. How Does Flu Spread?

Flu is thought to spread from person to person through the coughs and sneezes of people who are sick. People may also get sick by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose.

4. How Long Can a Sick Person Spread the Flu to Others?

People infected with seasonal and 2009 H1N1 flu shed virus and may be able to infect others from 1 day prior to getting sick to 5-7 days after the illness starts.

5. What Should I do to Decrease the Spread of Flu in the Home?

- Keep the sick person in a room separate from the common areas of the house.
- Remind the sick person to cover their coughs and clean their hands with soap and water frequently.
- The sick person should not have visitors other than caregivers. A phone call is safer than a visit.
- If possible, have only one adult in the home take care of the sick person.
- If you are in a high risk group for complications from influenza, you should attempt to avoid close contact with household members who are sick with influenza.
- Avoid having sick family members care for infants and other groups at high risk for complications of influenza.
- All persons in the household should clean their hands with soap and water or alcohol-based hand cleansers frequently, including every contact with the sick person.

6. What Should People Infected with Flu do?

- Keep away from others as much as possible. This is to keep from making others sick. Do not go to work or school while ill.
- Stay home until fever-free for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medicine, except to seek medical care or for other necessities.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Drink plenty of clear fluids such as water, broth, sports drinks, and electrolyte beverages for infants, to keep from becoming dehydrated.
- Cover cough and sneezes. Wash hands often with soap and water or alcohol-based hand cleansers.
- Be watchful for emergency warning signs (see below) that might indicate you need to seek medical attention.

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7. What are the Emergency Warning Signs?

In children:

- Fast breathing / trouble breathing
- Bluish skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Not waking up or not interacting
- Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough
- Fever with a rash

In adults:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting

8. Do I Need to go to the Emergency Room if I am Only a Little Sick?

No. The emergency room should be used for people who are very sick, not for people who are only mildly ill. If you have the emergency warning signs of flu, you should go to the emergency room immediately. If you get sick with flu symptoms and are at high risk of flu complications or you are concerned about your illness, call your health care provider for advice.

9. Are There Medications to Treat 2009 H1N1?

Yes. There are drugs your health care provider may prescribe for treating seasonal and 2009 H1N1 flu. These drugs may make you better faster and may also prevent serious complications. This flu season, antiviral drugs are being used mainly to treat people who are very sick, such as people who need to be hospitalized, and to treat sick people who are more likely to get serious flu complications. Your health care provider will decide whether antiviral drugs are needed to treat your illness. Remember, most people with 2009 H1N1 have mild illness and do not need medical care or antiviral drugs. The same is true for seasonal flu.

THIS INFORMATION WAS OBTAINED FROM THE CENTER OF DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION (CDC)
WEBSITE: cdc.gov/h1n1flu

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