

Flu information

What is the flu?

The flu (influenza) is an infection of the nose, throat, and lungs caused by influenza viruses. Flu viruses cause illness, hospital stays and deaths in the United States each year. There are many different flu viruses and sometimes a new flu virus emerges to make people sick.

What is novel H1N1 flu?

Novel H1N1 flu is a new and very different influenza virus that is spreading worldwide among people. This new virus was called "swine flu" at first because it has pieces of flu viruses found in pigs in the past. However, novel H1N1 virus has not been detected in U.S. pigs.

Influenza is unpredictable, but scientists believe that the new H1N1 virus will cause illness, hospital stays and deaths in the United States over the coming months. This flu season, the new virus may cause a lot more people to get sick than during a regular flu season. It also may cause more hospital stays and deaths than seasonal flu.

How serious is the flu?

The flu can be very serious, especially for younger children and children of any age who have one or more chronic medical conditions. These conditions include asthma or other lung problems, diabetes, weakened immune systems, kidney disease, heart problems and neurological and neuromuscular disorders. These conditions can result in more severe illness from influenza, including the new H1N1 virus.

How does flu spread?

Both novel H1N1 flu and seasonal flu are thought to spread mostly from person to person through the coughs and sneezes of people who are sick with influenza. People also may get sick by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose.

What are the symptoms of the flu?

Symptoms of seasonal flu and novel H1N1 flu include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people also may have vomiting and diarrhea.

How long can a sick person spread the flu to others?

People infected with seasonal and novel H1N1 flu shed virus and may be able to infect others from 1 day before getting sick to 5 to 7 days after. This can be longer in some people, especially children and people with weakened immune systems and in people infected with novel H1N1 flu.

Protect your child

How can I protect my child against flu?

Get a seasonal flu vaccine for yourself and your child to protect against seasonal flu viruses.

Take everyday steps to prevent the spread of all flu viruses. This includes:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. If soap and water are not available, alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.*



- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Teach your child to take these actions too.
- Try to keep your child from having close contact (about 6 feet) with sick people, including anyone in the household who is sick.
- Keep surfaces like bedside tables, surfaces in the bathroom, kitchen counters and toys for children clean by wiping them down with a household disinfectant according to directions on the product label.
- Throw away tissues and other disposable items used by sick persons in your household in the trash.

Is there a vaccine to protect my child from H1N1 flu?

A vaccine against novel H1N1 flu is being produced and will be available in the coming months as an option for the prevention of the new H1N1 flu. A vaccine against seasonal flu is available each fall and winter. More information about the new H1N1 flu vaccine and the seasonal flu vaccine is available on the CDC Web site.



Is there medicine to treat the flu?

Antiviral drugs can treat both seasonal flu and the new H1N1 flu. These drugs can make people feel better and get better sooner. But they need to be prescribed by a doctor and they work best when started during the first 2 days of illness. These drugs can be given to children. The priority use for these drugs is to treat people who are seriously ill or who have a medical condition that puts them at high risk of serious flu complications.

What should I use for hand cleaning?

Washing hands with soap and running water (for as long as it takes to sing the "Happy Birthday" song twice) will help protect against many germs. When soap and running water are not available, wipes or gels with alcohol in them can be used (the gels should be rubbed into your hands until they are dry).*

If your child is sick

What can I do if my child gets sick?

If your child is 5 years or older and otherwise healthy and gets flu-like symptoms, including a fever and/or cough, consult your doctor as needed and make sure your child gets plenty of rest and drinks enough fluids.

If your child is younger than 5, or of any age and has a medical condition like asthma, diabetes, or a neurologic problem and develops flu-like symptoms, including a fever and/or cough, call your doctor or get medical attention. This is because younger children and children who have chronic medical conditions (like asthma or diabetes) may be at higher risk of serious complications from influenza infection, including the new H1N1. Talk to your doctor early if you are worried about your child's illness.

What if my child seems very sick?

Even children who have always been healthy before or had the flu before can get a severe case of flu.

Call or take your child to a doctor right away if your child of any age has:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish or gray skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- 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
- Has other conditions (like heart or lung disease, diabetes, or asthma) and develops flu-like symptoms, including a fever and/or cough.

Can my child go to school, day care or camp if he or she is sick?

No. Your child should stay home to rest and to avoid giving the flu to other children.

When can my child go back to school after having the flu?

Keep your child home from school, day care or camp for at least 24 hours after their fever is gone. (Their fever should be gone without them having taken a fever-reducing medicine.) A fever is defined as 100°F or 37.8°C.

*Though the scientific evidence is not as extensive as that on hand washing and alcohol-based sanitizers, other hand sanitizers that do not contain alcohol may be useful for killing flu germs on hands in settings where alcohol-based products are prohibited.

For more information, visit www.douglascountyhealth.com, www.cdc.gov, or www.flu.gov or call Douglas County Health Department (402) 444-7213



Seasonal and Novel H1N1 Flu:

A Guide for Parents

