

# H1N1 Frequently Asked Questions and Answers

- [Versión en español](#)

## Table of Contents

- [Novel H1N1 Flu – General Information](#)
- [Current H1N1 Situation in the US, New York State and Worldwide](#)
- [Novel H1N1 Flu – Specifics about the Illness and Treatment](#)
- [Prevention](#)

## Novel H1N1 Flu – General Information

### What is H1N1 flu?

H1N1 is a new influenza (flu) virus first seen in the United States in April 2009. It is called "novel" H1N1 because the virus has never been identified before and is new. Novel H1N1 was initially called "swine flu" by health officials because many of the genes are similar to some flu viruses that pigs in North America can get. However, further study showed that this new virus contains genes from flu viruses that circulate in pigs in Europe and Asia as well as genes from birds and humans. Scientists call this a "quadruple reassortant" influenza virus.

### Is H1N1 flu the same as swine flu?

No. Swine flu is a respiratory disease of pigs caused by a different influenza virus. Outbreaks of swine flu happen regularly in pigs. People do not normally get swine flu, but human infections can and do happen. Most commonly, human cases of swine flu happen in people who are around pigs but it's possible for swine flu viruses to spread from person to person.

### Is this new H1N1 flu the same as seasonal flu?

No. Seasonal flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by human influenza viruses. It can cause mild to severe illness and at times can lead to death. Human flu viruses change a little bit every year, which is why people can get sick from the flu more than once. It is also why a new flu vaccine is produced each year; the vaccine must be made to protect against the particular viruses circulating that year.

### Is this new H1N1 flu virus the same as the bird flu (avian flu) that has been in the news in recent years?

No. Even though novel H1N1 contains avian (bird) genes, it is not the same. There are many different types of influenza viruses. The bird flu virus that has been watched closely is categorized as influenza A (H5N1), and is transmitted primarily among birds. Bird flu (avian flu) has not been found in the United States.

### Is this new H1N1 flu the same as pandemic flu?

It is unknown whether this new H1N1 virus could become a pandemic. Pandemic flu can occur when a new influenza A virus emerges for which there is little or no immunity in the human population, when it begins to cause serious illness and spreads easily between people worldwide. Because it is currently unknown how severe the illness will be in the general population and how easily the virus spreads between people, novel H1N1 is **not** the same as pandemic flu.

## Current H1N1 Situation in the US, New York and Worldwide

### Are there people infected with this new H1N1 flu in the U.S.?

Yes. Information on confirmed cases of novel H1N1 flu in the U.S. is available on the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website](#) .

### What is the current H1N1 flu situation in New York State?

Cases of novel H1N1 have been identified in New York State. Counts of New York State H1N1 flu cases can be found in the table on the [H1N1 home page](#). The NYCDOHMH has issued [recommendations for New York City residents on their web site](#).

### What is New York State doing to identify additional H1N1 flu cases in New York?

The New York State Department of Health conducts flu surveillance throughout the year. To ensure rapid detection of any H1N1 flu cases, the New York State Department of Health is testing selected laboratory samples from people who are suspected of having H1N1 flu.

### What other countries have confirmed cases of novel H1N1 flu?

Information on confirmed cases of novel H1N1 flu outside of the United States is available on the [World Health Organization website](#) .

## Novel H1N1 Flu – Specifics about the Illness and Treatment

### How does H1N1 flu virus spread?

The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has determined that novel H1N1 flu virus is spreading from person to person. Spread from person to person is thought to occur in the same way as seasonal flu, mainly through coughing or sneezing of infected people. However, at this time, it not known how easily the H1N1 flu virus spreads between people.

### How long after exposure do symptoms appear?

Because this virus is new, it is not known how long it takes for symptoms to appear after exposure. It could range from 1-7 days, and is more likely 1-4 days.

### What are the signs and symptoms of H1N1 flu in people?

The symptoms of this new H1N1 flu in people are similar to the symptoms of regular human flu and include fever greater than 100°F, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people have also reported diarrhea and vomiting.

If you or a family member becomes ill with influenza-like symptoms, you should contact your health care provider if the symptoms are severe or the ill person is at high risk for flu complications. Your health care provider will determine whether influenza testing or treatment is needed. If you or a family member is sick, you should stay home and avoid contact with other people as much as possible to keep from spreading your illness to others, except to seek medical care.

Like seasonal flu, novel H1N1 flu can vary in severity from mild to severe, and may cause a worsening of underlying chronic medical conditions. The severity of illness from the current H1N1 flu strain is not yet clear and is currently being studied by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

### What are the signs of more severe illness with this new H1N1 flu?

While most of the current novel H1N1 influenza cases have been mild, severe illnesses and death have occurred from this new flu virus. If you, or someone you know, becomes ill and experiences any of the following warning signs, seek emergency medical care immediately.

#### **In children, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:**

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing

- Bluish 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

#### **In adults, symptoms that need emergency medical attention include:**

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough

#### **How long can an infected person spread this new H1N1 flu to others?**

People with this novel H1N1 flu infection may be contagious from one day before they develop symptoms up to 7 days following illness onset. Children, especially younger children, might potentially be contagious for longer periods.

#### **Can H1N1 flu be treated?**

Yes. This H1N1 virus is susceptible to certain antiviral drugs used to treat flu infections. For treatment, antiviral drugs work best if started as soon as possible after getting sick (within 2 days of symptoms). If you become ill and are diagnosed with influenza, your health care provider can determine if you should take antiviral drugs.

#### **Can I get tested for H1N1 flu?**

The New York State Department of Health has provided guidance to health care providers and hospitals throughout the state regarding who should be tested for this new H1N1 flu and what specimens to collect. If you are severely ill or worried about your symptoms, contact your health care provider who will determine whether testing is necessary.

## **Prevention**

#### **Is there a vaccine against this new H1N1 virus?**

At this time, there is no vaccine for novel H1N1 flu. The seasonal influenza vaccine does not provide protection against this new H1N1 flu. This makes ordinary precautions, such as covering coughs and washing hands, all the more important.

#### **Should I keep my child home from school as a precaution?**

No. Parents do not need to keep otherwise healthy children home from school unless directed to do so by local school and health officials.

Children who are ill should not attend school. Monitor your child for influenza-like symptoms and keep them home if they are sick. Symptoms include fever, cough, body aches, runny or stuffy nose, sore throat, headache, chills and fatigue. Novel H1N1 can also cause nausea, vomiting or diarrhea. You may want to contact their health care provider, particularly if symptoms are severe. Be sure to tell your health care provider if you have recently traveled, especially to states in the U.S. or to other countries where H1N1 flu has

been confirmed. Your health care provider will determine whether influenza testing or treatment is needed.

### Should I ask my health care provider for a prescription anti-flu drug?

No. Antiviral drugs are usually used to treat people who are at risk for developing life-threatening complications from the flu. There is no reason to routinely ask for one of these drugs to keep at home, or to take them just as a precaution. Over-use could result in limited supplies for those who need it most. In addition, over-use of antiviral drugs has been known to lead to flu viruses becoming resistant to the drugs. All drugs, including antivirals, can cause side effects and should only be used when necessary under the direction of a health care provider.

### Can I get H1N1 flu from eating or preparing pork?

No. H1N1 influenza viruses are not spread by food. You cannot get H1N1 virus from eating pork or pork products. Eating properly handled and cooked pork products is safe.

### What can I do to protect myself from getting sick?

There are everyday actions that can help prevent the spread of germs that cause respiratory illnesses like influenza. Take these everyday steps to protect your health:

- 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. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.
- If you get sick with influenza, CDC recommends that you stay home from work or school for 7 days after your symptoms begin or until you have been symptom-free for 24 hours, whichever is longer. Limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.

### Should I avoid travel to other countries or areas of the United States where H1N1 flu has been identified?

At this time, CDC recommends that U.S. travelers avoid all nonessential travel to Mexico. Changes to this recommendation will be posted at <http://www.cdc.gov/travel/>.

Please check this site frequently for updates.

### What should I do if someone I live with has confirmed novel H1N1 flu?

Follow the same precautions you would to avoid ordinary seasonal flu:

- Limit your contact with the ill person. Avoid close contact such as kissing, and do not share towels, glasses or toothbrushes with the affected person.
- Avoid having visitors. If visitors must enter the home, they should avoid close contact with the ill person.
- Wash your hands with soap and water or with an alcohol-based hand rub.
- Consider using a facemask or an N95 respirator. These can be purchased at a pharmacy or hardware-type store. If you use a reusable fabric facemask, it should be laundered with normal laundry detergent and tumble-dried in a hot dryer.
- Wash dirty dishes and eating utensils in either a dishwasher or by hand with warm water and soap. You do not need to separate eating utensils for use by a patient with influenza.
- It is fine to do your laundry in a standard washing machine with warm or cold water and detergent. It is not necessary to separate the patient's laundry.

### Can household cleaning help prevent transmission?

Yes. For more information, visit [Information about Cleaning and Disinfectants](#) .

### Additional information can be found at the following web sites:

- [General influenza information](#)
- [CDC Information about H1N1 flu - cdc.gov](#)

Revised: May 2009