

Seasonal Flu & Swine Flu

This year, health care professionals are expecting a dual flu season-the routine seasonal influenza that is normally seen during the fall and winter months, and H1N1, or the swine flu.

Seasonal Influenza Symptoms

Influenza (commonly called the “flu”) is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. The information below describes common flu symptoms, how to protect yourself and those close to you from getting the flu, and what to do if you get sick with flu-like symptoms.

Be Aware of Common Flu Symptoms

Influenza usually starts suddenly and may include the following symptoms:

- Fever (usually high)
- Headache
- Tiredness (can be extreme)
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Body aches
- Diarrhea and vomiting (more common among children than adults)

Having these symptoms does not always mean that you have the flu. Many different illnesses, including the common cold, can have similar symptoms.

Diagnosing the Flu

It is very difficult to distinguish the flu from other infections on the basis of symptoms alone. A doctor's exam may be needed to tell whether you have developed the flu or a complication of the flu. There are tests that can determine if you have the flu as long you are tested within the first 2 or 3 days of illness. If you develop flu-like symptoms and are concerned about your illness, especially if are at high risk for complications of the flu, you should consult your healthcare provider. Those at high risk for complications include people 65 years or older, people with chronic medical conditions (such as asthma, diabetes, or heart disease), pregnant women, and young children.

Know The Risks from the Flu

In some people, the flu can cause serious complications, including bacterial pneumonia, dehydration, and worsening of chronic medical conditions, such as congestive heart failure, asthma or diabetes. Children and adults may develop sinus problems and ear infections.

People May Have Different Reactions to the Flu

The flu can cause mild to severe illness and at times can lead to death. Although most healthy people recover from the flu without complications, some people, such as older people, young children, and people with certain health conditions (such as asthma, diabetes, or heart disease), are at high risk for serious complications from the flu.

Know How the Flu Spreads

The flu usually spreads from person to person in respiratory droplets when people who are infected cough or sneeze. People occasionally may become infected by touching something with influenza virus on it and then touching their mouth, nose or eyes.

Healthy adults may be able to infect others 1 day before getting symptoms and up to 5 days after getting sick. Therefore, it is possible to give someone the flu before you know you are sick as well as while you are sick.

Best Protection against the Flu: Vaccination

The single best way to protect yourself and others against influenza is to get a flu vaccination each year. Two kinds of flu vaccine are available in the United States:

- The "flu shot" — an inactivated vaccine (containing killed virus) that is given with a needle, usually in the arm. The flu shot is approved for use in people older than 6 months, including healthy people and people with chronic medical conditions (such as asthma, diabetes, or heart disease).
- The nasal-spray flu vaccine — a vaccine made with live, weakened flu viruses that do not cause the flu (sometimes called LAIV for "live attenuated influenza vaccine" or FluMist®). LAIV (FluMist®) is approved for use in healthy* people 2-49 years of age who are not pregnant.

Yearly flu vaccination should begin in September or as soon as vaccine is available and continue throughout the influenza season, into December, January, and beyond. This is because the timing and duration of influenza seasons vary. While influenza outbreaks can happen as early as October, most of the time influenza activity peaks in January or later.

Target groups for the seasonal influenza vaccine are:

1. Children aged 6 months up to their 19th birthday
2. Pregnant women
3. People 50 years of age and older
4. People of any age with certain chronic medical conditions
5. People who live in nursing homes and other long-term care facilities
6. People who live with or care for those at high risk for complications from flu, including:
 - a. Health care workers
 - b. Household contacts of persons at high risk for complications from the flu
 - c. Household contacts and out of home caregivers of children less than 6 months of age (these children are too young to be vaccinated)

H1N1, or swine flu

Swine flu symptoms in people include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. A significant number of people who have been infected with this virus also have reported diarrhea and vomiting. Severe illnesses and death has occurred as a result of illness associated with this virus. While most people who get H1N1 experience mild symptoms and recover fully within a week even without medical help, a small number of otherwise healthy people, usually under the age of 50 years, experience very rapid progression to severe and often fatal illness, characterized by severe pneumonia that destroys lung tissue, and failure of multiple organs.

Target groups for the swine flu vaccine are: (When vaccine is first available)

- 1 – pregnant women
- 2 – people who live with or care for children younger than 6 months of age
- 3 – health care personnel and emergency medical services personnel
- 4 – persons between the ages of 6 months and 24 years
- 5 – people from ages 25 through 64 years who are at higher risk for novel H1N1 because of chronic health disorders or compromised immune systems

If initially vaccine is available in limited quantities –

- 1 – pregnant women
- 2 – people who live with or care for children younger than 6 months of age
- 3 – health care and emergency medical services personnel with direct patient contact
- 4 – children 6 months through 4 years of age
- 5 – children 5 through 18 years of age who have chronic medical conditions

Facts about seasonal flu vaccine and H1N1 (swine flu) vaccine:

- People over-age-65 are strongly recommended to get their seasonal flu vaccine as soon as possible.

- H1N1 (swine flu) vaccine does not replace the seasonal flu vaccine for those people at risk in both categories – it is intended for use alongside seasonal flu vaccine. The Seasonal flu shot IS NOT protective against H1N1 (swine flu).
- The vaccines can be administered on the same day.

Know What to Do About the Flu

- Cover your cough
- Wash your hands frequently
- If you have a fever, stay home for at least 24 hrs after that fever has ended
- Get a vaccine when it becomes available

(These are condensed notes taken from CDC, WHO, NIH, msnbc.com, and county web sites related to H1N1, and attendance at OCHD Pandemic Flu Coalition meeting 8/11/09. Also, www.flu.com)