

Novel H1N1 flu: Protecting yourself and your community

What is H1N1?

Novel (new) H1N1 influenza is a completely new strain of flu. No one had ever seen it before it started making people sick last April.

At first people called it “swine flu” – although you don’t really get it from pigs.

Once it was here, it quickly spread all around the world. When a strain of flu does that, it’s called a pandemic. This is the first one we’ve had in over 40 years.

Novel H1N1 is still with us. It’s been around all summer in Minnesota, although it has been making fewer people sick than it did at first.

Scientists have been concerned that it could come back in the fall, and send a second wave of disease through our communities. That now seems to be happening – especially in our schools.

How worried should we be?

You may have heard that this kind of flu doesn’t make people very sick. That’s only partly true.

It doesn’t make most people any sicker than regular, “seasonal” flu. But seasonal flu is a serious disease. It can make some people very sick. Every year, seasonal flu kills 36,000 people nationwide.

It also makes some people much sicker than others. Unlike seasonal flu, this new flu seems to target young adults and children more than older people.

Young children in particular are at risk. So are pregnant women and people with underlying health problems, like asthma or diabetes.

The novel H1N1 virus could also change, and start making people sicker. Flu viruses are unpredictable. They can change rapidly over time, and begin to behave very differently.

Even if new virus doesn’t change, we are likely to have two kinds of flu going around this fall – seasonal flu and novel H1N1. That could place a great burden on the health care system.

What should I do to be ready for the flu this year?

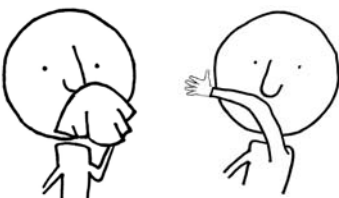
Get vaccinated, and get your family vaccinated - for both seasonal flu and novel H1N1. You’ll need to get both kinds of vaccine to be protected.

Many doctors and clinics already have this year’s seasonal vaccine. A vaccine for novel H1N1 should be available by early to mid-October – although we won’t have enough for everybody right away.

It’s especially important to get the H1N1 vaccine if you are:

- pregnant
- a child or young adult
- a health care worker or emergency worker
- someone who lives with or cares for a child under the age of 6 months (children that age can’t be vaccinated)
- someone with an underlying health condition

Both kinds of vaccine have been tested for effectiveness and safety. The novel H1N1 vaccine also isn’t really a new kind of vaccine. It’s made exactly the same way as the seasonal vaccine.



Cover your cough!



Wash your hands.



Stay home when sick.



Get vaccinated.

Novel H1N1 flu: Protecting yourself and your community– page 2

There are very simple things you can do to help prevent the spread of the virus. Cover your face with a sleeve or a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Wash your hands, thoroughly and frequently.

If you get sick with symptoms of the flu, stay home from work, or school, or other places where you could spread the virus to others.

Flu symptoms can include fever (higher than 100° F), cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people may also have vomiting and diarrhea.

If you have flu symptoms and you get very sick – or you're pregnant, or you have an underlying health problem – talk to a doctor about it. You may be given an anti-viral drug, to keep you from becoming severely ill and help you get better faster.

But call first before you visit a clinic – so you can be seen without exposing others to the flu.

If enough people get sick with the flu, people could be asked to stay at home for awhile -- even if they're well – to help stop the spread of the flu.

To be ready for that, make a family emergency plan – and a family emergency kit. Stock it with food, water and other supplies you'll need if you have to stay home for awhile. To find out how, go to <http://www.pandemicflu.gov/individualfamily/checlist.html>.

What if I don't have health insurance?

The novel H1N1 vaccine is free, but there may be a small charge for giving the shot. Local health departments in Minnesota are now making plans to vaccinate people against novel H1N1. They are taking steps to make sure cost is not a barrier to getting vaccinated.

If you need a seasonal flu shot, or treatment for severe flu, you may be able to find a clinic that charges based on ability to pay. For more information, go to <http://edocs.dhs.state.mn.us/lfserver/Legacy/DHS-4741-ENG>.

What about my immigration status?

Public health clinics and health care providers exist to prevent and treat disease. It is our job to protect the health of the entire community. While we can't speak for other government agencies, dealing with immigration issues is not part of that job.

What about travel?

Unlike the H5N1 "bird flu" from a few years ago, novel H1N1 doesn't raise any special concerns about travel. You aren't any more likely to get it in other parts of the world than you are in Minnesota. However, you should never spend time in an enclosed space with other people if you have symptoms of flu. That includes airplanes.

For more information and updates go to:

- Minnesota Department of Health
www.mdhflu.com
- U.S. Department of Health & Human Services
www.flu.gov
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
www.cdc.gov



Infectious Disease Epidemiology, Prevention and Control
P.O. Box 64975
St. Paul, MN 55164-0975
1-877-676-5414, TTY: 651-201-5797
www.health.state.mn.us