New Hampshire
Department of
Health and Human Services

Fact Sheet

H1N1 (Swine) Influenza

What is H1N1 influenza?

H1N1 influenza (or swine flu) is a highly contagious acute respiratory disease of pigs caused by type A influenza virus that regularly causes outbreaks of influenza in pigs.

Can humans catch H1N1 (swine) flu?

Swine flu viruses do not normally infect humans. However, sporadic human infections with swine flu have occurred. Most commonly, these cases occur in people with direct exposure to pigs (e.g., children near pigs at a fair or workers in the swine industry). However, there have been cases of human-to-human spread of swine flu.

What are the symptoms of H1N1 flu in humans?

The symptoms of H1N1 flu in people are similar to the symptoms of regular human seasonal influenza and include fever, coughing, stuffy nose and body aches. Some people with H1N1 flu have also reported having a sore throat, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea.

How does H1N1 flu spread?

Influenza viruses can be directly transmitted from pigs to people and from people to pigs. Human infection with flu viruses from pigs are most likely to occur when people are in close proximity to infected pigs, such as in pig barns and livestock exhibits housing pigs at fairs. Human-to-human transmission of H1N1 flu can also occur. This is thought to occur in the same way as seasonal flu occurs in people, which is mainly through person-to-person transmission through coughing or sneezing of people infected with the influenza virus. People can become infected when they touch surfaces and then touch their mouth or nose.

How long is someone with H1N1 flu infectious to others?

People with H1N1 flu virus infection should be considered potentially contagious one day before the onset of symptoms and as long as they are symptomatic, and possibly up to 7 days following the onset of illness. Children, especially younger children, might be contagious for longer periods.

Can people catch H1N1 (swine) flu from eating pork?

No. H1N1 flu viruses are not transmitted by food. You cannot get H1N1 flu from eating pork or pork products. Eating properly handled and cooked pork and pork products is safe. Cooking pork to an internal temperature of 160°F kills all viruses and other food-borne pathogens.

How serious is H1N1 flu infection?

Like seasonal flu, H1N1 flu in people can vary in severity from mild to severe. Between 2005 until January 2009, 12 human cases of swine flu (not H1N1) were detected in the U.S. with no deaths occurring. However, swine flu infection, and H1N1 infection, can be very serious, causing complications such as pneumonia.

What medications are available to treat H1N1 flu infections in humans?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends the use of oseltamivir or zanamivir for the treatment and/or prevention of infection with H1N1 flu. Antiviral drugs are prescription medicines (pills, liquid or an inhaler) that fight against the flu by keeping flu viruses from reproducing in your body. If you get sick, antiviral drugs can make your illness milder and make you feel better faster. They may also prevent serious flu complications. If you are sick and think you have the flu, contact your healthcare provider.

How can human infections with H1N1 flu be diagnosed?

To diagnose H1N1 flu A infection, a respiratory specimen would generally need to be collected within the first 4 to 5 days of illness (when an infected person is most likely to be shedding virus). However, some persons, especially children, may shed virus for 10 days or longer. Identification as an H1N1 flu influenza A virus requires sending the specimen to the state/public health lab for testing.

What can I do to protect myself from getting sick?

While there is no vaccine currently available to protect against H1N1 flu, there are a number of daily actions you can take to help prevent the spread of germs that cause respiratory illnesses like influenza:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people
- Avoid sharing eating utensils.
- If you get sick with influenza, stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.

For questions about H1N1 influenza, call the DHHS Office of Communicable Disease Control at 603-271-4496 or 1-800-852-3345 x4496. For further information refer to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at www.cdc.gov/H1N1flu, call the CDC information line at 1-800CDC-INFO, visit the World Health Organization website at www.who.int, or go to the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services website at www.dhhs.state.nh.gov.