



# Fact Sheet

South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control • [www.scdhec.gov](http://www.scdhec.gov)

## H1N1 Flu (Swine Flu): Frequently Asked Questions

### What is H1N1 flu?

The H1N1 flu currently affecting humans is a new influenza virus. This virus is also being called H1N1 Influenza A H1N1 or H1N1-Origin Influenza. It is usually a respiratory disease of pigs. People do not normally get H1N1 flu, but human infections can happen. We are now seeing it transmitted from person to person and causing a respiratory illness that is very similar to regular seasonal influenza.

### What are the symptoms of H1N1 flu?

The symptoms of H1N1 flu in people are expected to be similar to the symptoms of regular human seasonal influenza and include fever, achiness, lack of energy, lack of appetite and coughing. Some people with H1N1 flu also have reported runny nose, sore throat, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea.

### How do I know if I have H1N1 flu?

Since the symptoms for H1N1 flu are similar to the symptoms for seasonal flu, the only way to know for sure that you have H1N1 flu is for your doctor to take a swab from you and send the sample to a laboratory for confirmation. However, your case may be presumed to be H1N1 flu if:

1. You have the symptoms listed for H1N1 Flu;  
AND
2. have had close contact within the last seven (7) days with a person who has a laboratory confirmed case of H1N1 Flu;  
OR
3. have traveled within the last seven (7) days to a community either within the United States or internationally where there are one or more laboratory confirmed cases of H1N1 Flu;  
OR
4. Reside in a community where there are one or more laboratory confirmed H1N1 Flu cases.

### How severe is H1N1 flu?

The severity of cases in the current H1N1 flu outbreak has varied widely. In Mexico, there have been deaths and other severe cases. Early cases in the U.S. have been mild but there has been a death reported from Texas. The virus itself could change, either becoming more or less dangerous. Scientists are watching closely to see how severe the new H1N1 flu virus will be—but health experts warn that it can be hard to predict how flu viruses can change.

### How do I prevent my family and me from catching H1N1 flu?

Public Health recommends that you use the same precautions to prevent H1N1 flu as you would for seasonal flu:

- Wash your hands frequently or use an alcohol hand rub;
- Don't touch your hands, mouth and eyes because that's how viruses get into your body;
- Stay about six feet away from someone who has a respiratory infection when possible; and
- Practice a healthy lifestyle—get enough sleep and eat healthy.

## **If I think I am sick, how do I keep my family members and others from getting sick?**

Public Health recommends that you use the same precautions to prevent others from getting H1N1 flu as you would for seasonal flu:

- Cover your cough, either with a tissue or cough into your sleeve;
- Sneeze into a tissue or your sleeve; and
- Stay home from work or school if you are sick.

## **When should I go to the doctor?**

Call a health care provider if you cannot take care for yourself or a loved one at home, or if you or a family member has a high fever with shaking chills, coughing that produces thick mucous, shortness of breath or trouble breathing or a worsening of an existing medical condition.

## **How is H1N1 flu spread?**

The new H1N1 flu virus apparently spreads just like regular flu. You could pick up germs directly from an infected person, or by touching an object they recently touched, and then touching your eyes, mouth, or nose, putting germs into your body. That's why you should make washing your hands a habit, even when you're not ill. Infected people can start spreading flu germs up to a day before symptoms start, and for up to seven days after getting sick, according to the Centers For Disease Control and Prevention.

The H1N1 flu virus can become airborne if you cough or sneeze without covering your nose and mouth, sending germs into the air.

## **I got the flu shot this year, could I still get the H1N1 flu?**

Yes, you could still catch H1N1 flu or Influenza A H1N1. It is a new virus so the current vaccine does not protect against it.

## **I had the flu earlier this year, can I still catch the H1N1 flu?**

Yes, you could still catch H1N1 flu or Influenza A H1N1. It is a new virus that no one has immunity for.

## **What medicines can/should I take if I think I have H1N1 flu?**

The new H1N1 flu virus is sensitive to the antiviral drugs Tamiflu and Relenza. The Centers For Disease Control and Prevention recommends those drugs to prevent or treat H1N1 flu; the drugs are most effective when taken within 48 hours of the start of flu symptoms. But not everyone needs those drugs; many of the first people in the U.S. with lab-confirmed H1N1 flu recovered without treatment. Treatment is particularly recommended for those who are at high risk for complications from the flu including children less than 5 years of age, the elderly and those with chronic medical conditions. These drugs can be obtained through a prescription from your physician. DHEC has made plans to supply hospitals and other partners to assure that drugs are available for people with severe disease.

You can also use over the counter influenza medications to treat your symptoms.

Remember to drink lots of fluids and rest.

## **Should I call my doctor or go to the hospital?**

If you have flu symptoms, stay home, and when you cough or sneeze, cover your mouth and nose with a tissue. Afterward, throw the tissue in the trash and wash your hands. That will help prevent your flu from spreading.

If you have severe flu symptoms see a doctor. Inform your doctor if you've recently been to a high-risk area like Mexico or have been in contact with known H1N1 flu cases.

Keep in mind that your doctor will not be able to determine whether you have H1N1 flu, but he or she would take a sample from you and send it to a lab for testing to see if it's H1N1 flu

**If my doctor says I have H1N1 Flu, is he going to isolate me?**

No. But, if you are sick with the flu, whether it is the seasonal flu, or is suspected as the H1N1 Flu, you should stay at home to prevent exposing others to your illness. Public Health officials and your doctor may ask you to stay at home until your symptoms have disappeared, for at least 24 hours. Your family members who have been exposed to you should avoid contact with others.

**If I get H1N1 Flu, will I die?**

Every year the seasonal flu kills people, usually those who are most vulnerable such as young children, the elderly or those with medical conditions. According to the World Health Organization, the virus called the H1N1 Flu currently has a low death rate of one to four percent of those who are infected.

**Is H1N1 Flu in my community?**

To find out the status of H1N1 Flu in South Carolina, go to the website of the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (SCDHEC) at [www.scdhec.gov](http://www.scdhec.gov). There you will find up to date information on the status of H1N1 Flu in South Carolina.

**Should I wear a mask?**

Right now, public health officials are not recommending that everyone wear a mask. However, if one of your family members has been diagnosed by your doctor as having H1N1 flu and you need to go out in public, such as to the grocery store, then public health officials ask that you wear a mask.

**Where can I get masks?**

Right now, if public health officials have asked your family member to be isolated, then public health will provide you a mask to wear. For others, masks (or respirators) can be purchased at your local pharmacy or other retailer.

**Can I catch H1N1 flu by eating pork?**

No. H1N1 influenza viruses are not transmitted by food.

**Can I catch H1N1 flu from my pigs?**

The U.S. residents infected with H1N1 flu virus had no direct contact with pigs. The risk of transmission for the new H1N1 flu virus in the U. S. is from humans not pigs.

**My co-worker looks sick but won't go to the doctor. What should I do?**

You should express your concerns to your supervisor.