

Q & A

H1N1 Influenza

1. What is pandemic flu and why is it such a problem?

New influenza viruses emerge when mutations occur in existing viruses. If the new or “novel” virus can infect humans and spreads easily from person to person, it can become a pandemic. This means there are many cases across the world. During past pandemics, 25-35% of the world’s population was infected.

2. What is swine flu (H1N1)?

H1N1 is a new influenza virus causing illness in people. This new virus was first detected in the U.S. in April 2009 and has been designated a pandemic. Many countries have reported people who are sick with this new virus. This virus is spreading from person to person in much the same way that regular seasonal influenza viruses spread.

3. How do you catch H1N1?

Spread of H1N1 flu can occur in one of two ways:

- Through contact with contaminated environmental surfaces
- Through contact with a person with H1N1 flu (mainly coughing or sneezing)

4. What are the signs and symptoms of H1N1 flu in humans?

The symptoms of H1N1 are similar to those of seasonal flu and include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headaches, chills and fatigue. The symptoms can be worse if there are underlying chronic medical conditions.

In children, emergency warning signs include:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish or grey skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Not waking up or responding
- Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
- Symptoms that improve but then return with a fever and worse cough

5. How serious is H1N1 flu?

Like seasonal flu, H1N1 can vary in severity from mild to severe. With the possible exception of some older people, few, if any, have immunity to this virus.

6. What should I do if my child or I get sick?

If you live in areas where people have been identified with new H1N1 viruses and become ill with flu-like symptoms (see #4), you should stay home and avoid contact with other people, except to seek medical care. If you have severe illness or are at high risk for flu complications, contact your health care provider or seek medical care. Your health care provider will determine whether flu testing or treatment is needed.

7. How long can an infected person spread H1N1 flu to others?

Current CDC guidance suggests that individuals stay home until at least 24 hours have passed without a fever. Longer stays might be needed with a severe case of influenza.

8. Which age groups are most likely to be affected during an influenza outbreak?

The groups prioritized for voluntary vaccination when vaccine is available are:

- pregnant women
- children 6 months to 24 years old
- family members living with a baby under 6 months old
- emergency and health care workers
- adults between 25-64 years old with a compromising medical condition

9. What is the best way to prevent the spread of the flu?

- a. Hand washing (for at least 20 seconds)
- b. Proper cough and sneeze etiquette
- c. Stay home when you are ill
- d. Ask teachers to practice hand washing and cough etiquette with students
- e. Keep sick students separate from other kids at school

10. How many cases are there in my child's school/district/county?

Each school in Macomb County reports the number of children out of school with influenza-like illness each week to the Macomb County Health Department. The Health Department uses these numbers to monitor illness rates in the county. Because H1N1 virus has spread all over the world, it is no longer possible or necessary to test or confirm each case of H1N1 influenza.

11. What should I do if my child is exposed?

Watch for signs/symptoms of illness (see #4). Keep your child home if symptoms appear. In the absence of symptoms, send your child to school.

12. What is the treatment for H1N1?

A mild case of flu is treated with rest, fluids, fever-reducing medicines (not aspirin) and TLC. If symptoms of flu are more severe, medical attention is warranted. Your physician may choose to prescribe an anti-viral drug such as Tamiflu.

13. Who makes the decision to close a school or a district due to illness?

The decision to close a building is made by your local superintendent with consultation from the Macomb County Health Department. Current CDC guidance does not suggest that schools automatically close for seasonal, H1N1 or any other type of flu. If too many students or staff are out, making instruction impossible, a local decision could be made to temporarily close a school.

14. How long would a school be closed and how would I be notified of the closure and the re-opening?

At this time, CDC does not recommend the automatic closure of schools where flu cases are identified. If a school does close, it would be for the shortest possible time and you would be notified through the media.

15. What special cleaning procedures are used if cases of flu are identified?

No special cleaning procedures or products are required to clean schools where flu has been identified. School staff will continue to clean the buildings thoroughly. It is everyone's responsibility to wash their hands frequently and use proper cough and sneeze etiquette.

16. What about keeping my child home "just in case"?

Students and staff are expected to attend school if they are healthy and school is open. At this time, the Michigan Dept. of Education is stating that days missed outside of the planned calendar and allowable "unplanned days" (snow, electrical problems, illness) must be made up by districts.

17. What is the difference between a vaccine and an antiviral drug?

Vaccines are usually given to prevent infections. Influenza vaccines are made from either pieces of the killed influenza virus or weakened versions of the live virus which will not lead to disease. When vaccinated, the body's immune system makes antibodies, which will fight off infection if exposure to the virus occurs. Antivirals are drugs that can treat people who have already been infected by a virus.

18. When will H1N1 vaccine be available and where can I get it?

- a. Macomb County Health Department expects to receive vaccine by Nov. 1, 2009.
- b. The vaccine will likely be in two doses administered 3 to 4 weeks apart. These are in addition to seasonal flu vaccine.
- c. The vaccine will be available in several places including schools, community clinics and doctors' offices.
- d. People who fall into the priority categories (see #8) will be the first to receive vaccine.
- e. Vaccine provided by the Health Department is free of charge.

19. What can a parent do to prepare for the flu in 2009-2010?

- a. Plan for child care at home.
- b. Update emergency contact lists.
- c. Collect games/books, etc., for your children.
- d. Ask your doctor about flu vaccination.

You will receive information about school-based vaccine clinics from your child's building principal in mid-September.

More information about flu can be found at the MISD website at www.misd.net or by calling the Macomb County Health Department at 586-466-7923.

Special information can be found for non-English speaking families at 1-800-CDC-INFO or the Refugee Health Information Network website www.rhin.org.

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