



Nevada State Health Division

Influenza Questions (Q) and Answers (A)

Q - What is the Novel H1N1 virus (swine flu)?

A - H1N1 (referred to as "swine flu" early on) is a new influenza virus causing illness in people and was first detected in the United States in April, 2009. To distinguish it from flu viruses that infect mainly pigs and from the seasonal influenza A H1N1 viruses that have been in circulation for many years, the CDC is calling the new virus "novel influenza A (H1N1) virus" and the illness the "H1N1 flu." The World Health Organization is calling it "pandemic (H1N1) 2009," and the illness the "pandemic influenza A (H1N1)." The Nevada State Health Division is adopting the CDC terminology.

Q - Why was the novel H1N1 virus called "the swine flu?"

A - This virus was originally referred to as "swine flu" because early laboratory testing showed that many of the genes in this new virus were very similar to an influenza virus that normally occurs in pigs (yes, pigs get the flu, too). More extensive studies have shown that this new virus is very different from what it was first thought to be. It has two genes from flu viruses that normally circulate in pigs, as well as, an avian and a human gene. After the additional identification of these other two, bird and human, genes scientists no longer refer to it as "the swine flu."

Q - Is the novel H1N1 virus contagious? If so, how is it spread?

A - Yes, CDC has determined that the novel H1N1 virus is contagious and spreads from human to human the same way that seasonal flu spreads.

Flu viruses are spread mainly from person to person through coughing or sneezing of people with influenza. Sometimes people may become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose.

Q - How serious is H1N1 flu?

A – Influenza is a serious illness. Every year, many people become ill, some severely ill, and some will die from influenza viruses. Like seasonal flu, novel H1N1 flu can vary in severity from mild to severe. It is unclear at this time how serious this new influenza virus will be. This is why the Federal Government is taking it very seriously and asking State and Local Agencies, Businesses and the Public to prepare for the possibility of a serious fall flu season.

Q- What is the difference between an epidemic and a pandemic?

A – The spread of infectious diseases has three main classifications: 1.outbreak 2.epidemic, and 3. pandemic. In general all three of these classifications share the same distinction that the disease being referenced is affecting a greater number of people than is usual or anticipated for a specific region or group of people.

The appropriate term used to describe the spread of disease (outbreak, epidemic, or pandemic) varies based on the specific disease and expected number of cases within a population. Two linked cases of a rare infectious disease may be sufficient to constitute an outbreak, or for a more common disease the term “outbreak” may require thousands of people being infected. The term “epidemic” is the next step up from an outbreak and is used when the rate of disease substantially exceeds what is expected and is affecting a particular region in a country or a group of countries. The term “pandemic” can be thought of as an epidemic that spreads across an even larger region (for example a continent), or even worldwide and infects more people than an epidemic. Pandemic is usually reserved for situations when the global population is affected.

Q - How many people have novel H1N1 flu?

A – Due to the fact that so many people have become infected, it is no longer feasible to test everyone suspected of having novel H1N1 flu. The CDC counts hospitalizations and deaths of persons with seasonal and novel H1N1 influenza, and those with influenza-like-illness (ILI). This information can be found at:
<http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/update.htm>

Q - What should I do to keep from becoming infected and becoming ill with the flu?

A - First and most important: wash your hands frequently. Also, try to stay in good general health. Get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids, and eat nutritious food. Try not touch surfaces that may be contaminated with the flu virus. Avoid close contact with people who are sick.

Get vaccinated for the seasonal flu now, as well as the novel H1N1 flu, when it becomes available. The seasonal flu vaccine does not provide protection for the novel H1N1 flu. The seasonal flu vaccine is currently available (the novel H1N1 vaccine is expected to be available in October.)

There are everyday acts we all can do to help prevent the spread of germs which cause respiratory illnesses like influenza:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it. If a tissue is not available, cough or sneeze into your shirt sleeve.

- Wash your hands often with soap and warm water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth prior to washing your hands.
- Try to avoid close contact with people who appear to be sick.
- If you get sick with influenza, stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.

Q - What are the signs and symptoms of H1N1?

A - The symptoms of H1N1 flu are similar to the symptoms of the regular seasonal flu and include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people have reported diarrhea and vomiting associated with novel H1N1 flu. Like seasonal flu, novel H1N1 flu may cause a worsening of underlying chronic medical conditions.

Q - What should I do if I get sick?

A – Now is the time to prepare yourself, your family and home for the flu. If you become ill with influenza-like symptoms, including fever, body aches, runny nose, sore throat, nausea, or vomiting or diarrhea, you may want to contact your health care provider, particularly if you are worried about the severity of the symptoms you are experiencing. Your health care provider will determine whether influenza testing or treatment is needed.

To keep from spreading your illness to others, you should stay home and avoid contact with other people as much as possible.

Q – If I do become infected, are there medicines to treat novel H1N1?

A - Yes. Antiviral prescription medications (pills, liquid or an inhaler) are available, which can make your illness milder and make you feel better faster. They may also prevent serious flu complications. Antiviral drugs work best if started soon after getting sick (within 2 days of symptoms). If your doctor decides to prescribe medication, the CDC recommends the use of oseltamivir (Tamiflu) or zanamivir (Relenza) for the treatment of influenza viruses.

Q – I hear people say “Only seek medical care if/when your symptoms are severe.” What is considered a severe infection?

A – Most individuals infected with the novel H1N1 virus will experience usual influenza-like-illness (ILI) and do not need to seek medical attention. It is recommended that you treat the symptoms as you would any illness, with appropriate over-the-counter

medications (i.e. pain relievers, cough, cold and flu medicines) while the infection runs its course. If however, the symptoms are more intense than what is customary for you, seek medical attention immediately.

If you become ill and experience any of the following warning signs, seek emergency medical care.

In children, warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

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

In adults, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough

Q - Who is most susceptible to getting severe novel H1N1 illness?

A - Based on the history of the illness it is recommended that the groups listed below receive the 2009 H1N1 influenza vaccine first:

- Pregnant women
- Household contacts and caregivers for children younger than 6 months of age
- Healthcare and emergency medical services personnel who provide direct care to sick people
- All people from 6 months through 24 years of age
- Persons aged 25 through 64 years who have health conditions associated with higher risk of medical complications from influenza.

For a more detailed explanation go to: <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/vaccination/acip.htm>

Q - How long can an infected person spread H1N1 to others?

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

Q - How long can viruses live outside the body?

A - We know that some viruses and bacteria can live 2 hours or longer on surfaces like cafeteria tables, doorknobs and desks. Frequent hand washing will help you reduce the chance of getting contamination from these common surfaces.

Q - What surfaces are most likely to be sources of contamination?

A - Germs can be spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose, or mouth. This means that any surface (e.g. a phone, desk, shopping cart, money, etc.) which has been exposed to an infected person's respiratory droplets could be considered a source of infectivity. You should try to refrain from touching your eyes, mouth or nose before washing your hands

Q - What is the best technique for washing hands that I should practice and teach to my child(ren)?

A - Hand washing, when done properly, is one of the best ways to avoid getting sick. This simple habit requires only soap and warm water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer (a cleanser that doesn't require water).

Proper hand washing with soap and water

Washing with soap and water:

- Wet your hands with warm, running water and apply liquid soap or use clean bar soap. Lather well.
- Rub your hands vigorously together for at least 15 to 20 seconds.
- Scrub all surfaces, including the backs of your hands, wrists, between your fingers and under your fingernails.
- Rinse well.
- Dry your hands with a clean or disposable towel.
- Use a towel to turn off the faucet.

Using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer:

- Apply about 1/2 teaspoon of the product to the palm of your hand.
- Rub your hands together, covering all surfaces of your hands, until they're dry.

Q - Can I get H1N1 from eating or preparing pork?

A - No. influenza viruses are not spread by food. You cannot get the novel H1N1 influenza virus (previously known as swine flu) from eating pork or pork products.

Q – I own my own business. What should I be doing to prepare for the flu season?

A – Employers should encourage employees with flu-like symptoms or illness to stay home. If people begin to experience flu-like symptoms at work, they should be sent home. Businesses should also address how to operate with less staff should the flu season become severe and employees need to remain at home.

Guidelines can be found online at:

<http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/workplaceplanning/guidance.html>

There is also a communication toolkit for businesses and employers online at:

<http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/workplaceplanning/toolkit.html>

The CDC also provides flyers, posters, and other materials to post and distribute in the workplace to help educate workers about strategies for preventing the flu at:

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/workplace/>

Q – My question was not asked and answered here, where can I find more frequently asked questions (FAQ's)?

NSHD: Flu.nv.gov

Flu.gov: <http://www.pandemicflu.gov/faq/swineflu/>

CDC: <http://www.cdc.gov/H1N1flu/qa.htm>

WHO: http://www.who.int/csr/disease/swineflu/frequently_asked_questions/en/

San Francisco Health Dept: <http://www.pandemicflu.gov/faq/swineflu/>