

NOVEL H1N1 INFLUENZA: BASIC FACTS

The following information on Swine Flu is from the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). More information on the current Swine Flu investigation can be found from the CDC and other public health organizations at the links provided in the text below.

What is novel H1N1 (Swine Flu)?

Novel H1N1 (referred to as “Swine Flu” early on) is a new influenza virus causing illness in people. This new virus was first detected in people in the United States in April 2009. Other countries, including Mexico and Canada, have reported people sick with this new virus. This virus is spreading from person-to-person, probably in much the same way that regular seasonal influenza viruses spread.

Why is novel H1N1 virus sometimes called “swine flu”?

This virus was originally referred to as “swine flu” because laboratory testing showed that many of the genes in this new virus were very similar to influenza viruses that normally occur in pigs (swine) in North America. But further study has shown that this new virus is very different from what normally circulates in North American pigs. It has two genes from flu viruses that normally circulate in pigs in Europe and Asia and bird (avian) genes and human genes. Scientists call this a “quadruple reassortant” virus.

Are there human infections with novel H1N1 virus in the U.S.?

Yes. Cases of human infection with novel H1N1 influenza virus were first confirmed in the U.S. in Southern California and near Guadalupe County, Texas. The outbreak intensified rapidly from that time and more and more states have been reporting cases of illness from this virus. An updated case count of confirmed novel H1N1 flu infections in the United States is kept at <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/update.htm>. CDC and local and state health agencies are working together to investigate this situation.

Is novel H1N1 virus contagious?

The CDC has determined that this Swine Influenza A (H1N1) virus is contagious and is spreading from human to human. However, at this time, it not known how easily the virus spreads between people.

How does novel H1N1 virus spread?

Spread of novel H1N1 virus is thought to occur in the same way that seasonal flu spreads. Flu viruses are spread mainly from person to person through coughing or sneezing by people with influenza. Sometimes people may become infected by touching something – such as a surface or object – with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose.

What are the signs and symptoms of this virus in people?

The symptoms of novel H1N1 flu virus in people include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. A significant number of people who have been infected with this virus also have reported diarrhea and vomiting. Severe illnesses and death has occurred as a result of illness associated with this virus.

How severe is illness associated with novel H1N1 flu virus?

Illness with the new H1N1 virus has ranged from mild to severe. While most people who have been sick have recovered without needing medical treatment, hospitalizations and deaths from infection with this virus have occurred.

In seasonal flu, certain people are at “high risk” of serious complications. This includes people 65 years and older, children younger than five years old, pregnant women, and people of any age with certain chronic medical conditions. About 70 percent of people who have been hospitalized with this novel H1N1 virus have had one or more medical conditions previously recognized as placing people at “high risk” of serious seasonal flu-related complications. This includes pregnancy, diabetes, heart disease, asthma and kidney disease.

One thing that appears to be different from seasonal influenza is that adults older than 64 years do not yet appear to be at increased risk of novel H1N1-related complications thus far. CDC laboratory studies have shown that children and few adults younger than 60 years old do not have existing antibody to novel H1N1 flu virus; however, about one-third of adults older than 60 may have antibodies against this virus. It is unknown how much, if any, protection may be afforded against novel H1N1 flu by any existing antibody.

How long can an infected person spread this virus to others?

People infected with seasonal and novel H1N1 flu shed virus and may be able to infect others from 1 day before getting sick to 5 to 7 days after. This can be longer in some people, especially children and people with weakened immune systems and in people infected with the new H1N1 virus.

Where can I get more information on novel H1N1?

For more information, please refer to included information and guideline documents generated by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other public health organizations:

- CDC's novel H1N1 information: <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/>
- US Department of Health and Human Services-Pandemic Influenza Plan: <http://www.hhs.gov/pandemicflu/plan/>
- Occupational Safety and Health Administration: Pandemic Influenza Preparedness and Response Guidance: <http://www.osha.gov/dsg/guidance/avian-flu.html>
- The official U.S. government web site for information on pandemic, seasonal, and 2009-H1N1 influenza: www.pandemicflu.gov