

Frequently Asked Questions—H1N1 Influenza

What is H1N1 influenza?

H1N1 is a new influenza virus causing illness in people. The new virus was first detected in people in the United States in April 2009. This virus can spread person-to-person in much the same way that regular seasonal influenza viruses spread.

What are the symptoms of H1N1 influenza?

The symptoms of H1N1 flu in people are similar to the symptoms of seasonal flu and include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. A number of people, particularly children, who have been infected with H1N1 have reported diarrhea and vomiting. Symptoms usually appear one to three days after exposure.

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

People may be contagious from one day before they develop symptoms to up to seven days after they get sick. Children, especially younger children, can be contagious for longer periods.

Is there a vaccine to protect against H1N1?

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is advising states that vaccine companies are working on producing an H1N1 vaccination. The CDC thinks that H1N1 vaccine might be available as early as mid-October, but it could be later in the fall/winter. The Department of Health is planning vaccination clinics to protect people against H1N1 and seasonal flu.

Do I need to get the regular flu vaccine in addition to the H1N1 vaccine?

Yes. You will need a separate vaccination to protect against seasonal influenza. The Department of Health and private healthcare providers will have vaccine available for seasonal influenza in the early fall. People should go to their private provider for vaccine. The Department of Health provides free influenza vaccine in public health offices in every county to people who are uninsured and can't get vaccine elsewhere. The Department of Health will announce the dates, times and locations of clinics when the vaccine is received in the fall.

Will wearing a mask protect me from getting H1N1 influenza?

Masks are not recommended for the general public as prevention from getting sick with H1N1 influenza. Masks are used in healthcare settings on people who are already sick to prevent them from spreading the virus to others.

What can I do to protect myself from getting sick?

Take these everyday steps to protect your health:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.

- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.

How severe is H1N1 influenza?

H1N1 illness has been mild so far in New Mexico and it's not known at this time if the strain will become more severe. The Department of Health is planning for the potential increase in the number and severity of H1N1 flu cases in the fall. Pregnant women as well as children and adults with chronic medical conditions like asthma, diabetes and obesity are at risk for developing serious complications from H1N1 influenza.

What treatment is available for H1N1 influenza?

Some antiviral medications may be effective to reduce the severity of H1N1 influenza. Rest, liquids and over-the-counter medicine are the usual treatments. Antibiotics will not cure the flu. Aspirin should not be given to children with influenza because of the possibility of causing a complication called Reye syndrome.

What should I do if I get sick?

If you are sick with influenza-like symptoms you should stay home and avoid contact with other people until you feel well enough to return to work or school and have not had a fever for 24 hours. If you have severe illness that includes fever, cough, sore throat, chills and fatigue, or you 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.

What can I do to plan at home for H1N1 influenza?

You should plan that in an emergency some services may be disrupted including hospitals and other health care facilities, banks, stores, restaurants, government offices and post offices. To plan for any disruption of services, you should do the following:

- Store a two week supply of water and food.
- Periodically check your regular prescription drugs to ensure a continuous supply in your home.
- Have any nonprescription drugs and other health supplies on hand, including pain relievers, stomach remedies, cough and cold medicines, fluids with electrolytes, and vitamins.
- Talk with family members and loved ones about how they would be cared for if they got sick, or what will be needed to care for them in your home.

What should I do if my kids have to stay home because illness or a school closure?

Plan home learning activities, exercises and recreational activities that your children can do at home and have educational materials, such as books, on hand. Arrange for childcare and check with your employer in advance about working from home if your child must stay home. You should also plan for a possible reduction or loss of your income if you are unable to work while your children are home.

Is there anything I can do to help New Mexico prepare for H1N1?

Yes. Due to the increase in the number of vaccinations, the Department of Health is recruiting additional health care professionals to help vaccinate people or potentially respond to an emergency. We will also need volunteers to assist in other ways at vaccination clinics. To volunteer through the NMserve database, a statewide registry of volunteers, go to www.nmserves.org or call Bobbie MacKenzie at 505-476-8302.