

2009 H1N1 Influenza (Swine Flu) and Children

The 2009 H1N1 influenza is a type of flu. Like any flu, it mainly affects the lungs. It is caused by the influenza A (H1N1) virus, a new flu virus. The 2009 H1N1 flu is sometimes called swine flu because scientists originally thought the virus came from pigs (swine). But it is now known that this is not the case and that the germ is a new virus. This sheet answers some questions you may have about 2009 H1N1 flu.

How Does 2009 H1N1 Flu Spread?

The 2009 H1N1 flu virus can spread easily among children or adults the same way the regular flu spreads—through the air in droplets when someone with the virus coughs, sneezes, laughs, or talks. A child or adult can also become infected after touching a contaminated surface and then touch the eyes, nose, or mouth.

Note: 2009 H1N1 flu is not caused by eating pork or pork products. Eating pork or pork products that have been properly handled and cooked is safe.

What Are the Symptoms of 2009 H1N1 Flu?

2009 H1N1 flu symptoms are about the same as regular flu symptoms. A child may have:

- Fever, usually higher than 100°F, and chills
- Headache
- Body and muscle aches
- Sore throat
- Dry cough
- Tiredness and weakness
- In some cases, diarrhea, or vomiting

Call the child's healthcare provider for advice if any of the above symptoms are severe. If 2009 H1N1 flu is in your area, the healthcare provider may have the child tested.

How Is 2009 H1N1 Flu Treated?

If 2009 H1N1 flu is in your area and the child's symptoms are severe, the child's healthcare provider may prescribe medications called antivirals. These must be taken within 2 days of when the child's symptoms started. Antivirals work by stopping the 2009 H1N1 virus from reproducing in the body. This gives the body's immune system a chance to fight the virus. After taking the medication, the child's symptoms may be milder and he or she may recover quicker than without the medication. The medication may also prevent serious complications such as pneumonia. Be sure to give ALL of the medication as prescribed until it is gone, even if your child feels better. If the child's symptoms are mild or it has been more than 2 days since the symptoms started, the doctor will likely not prescribe antiviral medications. Instead, the comfort measures listed below are used. Note that antibiotics are NOT helpful against influenza.

Easing Your Child's Symptoms

- Give your child plenty of fluids such as water, juice, and warm soup to prevent dehydration.
- Have your child sleep and rest quietly as much as possible.
- Ask your child's healthcare provider whether it is okay to give your child acetaminophen (Tylenol) or other medications for fever and pain. Give these medications to your child as directed. Do not give aspirin to any child under age 18 who is ill with a fever. It can cause a rare but serious illness called Reye syndrome, which can lead to liver damage.

This information is not intended as a substitute for professional medical care. Always follow your healthcare professional's instructions.

When to Call the Doctor

Call your child's doctor right away if your child has any of the following:

- Symptoms that get better, then return with a fever and worse cough
- Fever over 100°F
- Fever with a rash
- Trouble breathing or fast breathing
- Blue skin or lips
- Extreme sleepiness or not interacting
- Refusal to feed or drink fluids
- Severe or repeated vomiting or inability to keep fluids down
- In infants, not wanting to be held

Taking Steps to Protect Yourself and Others

When caring for a child with influenza, take these steps to help keep the illness from spreading to yourself or others:

- Wash your hands often. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth as much as possible. Instruct family members to do the same.
- If soap and water isn't available, hands can be cleaned with an alcohol-based hand gel containing at least 60 percent alcohol.
- Teach your child to wash his or her hands often, especially after coughing or sneezing.
- Have your child cough or sneeze into a tissue. Then throw the tissue away and wash your hands. Teach an older child who doesn't have a tissue to cough or sneeze into the crook of the elbow.
- Keep your child home for at least 24 hours after he or she no longer has a fever or fever symptoms (such as chills). Be sure that the fever isn't being hidden by fever-reducing medications (such as Tylenol or Advil).
- Don't allow your child to share food, utensils, drinking glasses, or a toothbrush with others.
- Ask your doctor whether you or others in your household should receive antiviral medication to help avoid infection.

How Can 2009 H1N1 Flu Be Prevented?

- One of the best ways to prevent the 2009 H1N1 flu is to get vaccinated. Most often, the vaccine is given as a shot. But some children may receive the vaccine in nasal spray form instead. Your child's doctor can tell you which vaccine is right for your child.
- Wash your hands often and have your child wash often, too. Frequent handwashing is a proven way to prevent infection.
- Carry an alcohol-based hand gel containing at least 60 percent alcohol. Use it when you don't have access to soap and water. Alcohol gels kill most germs and are safe for children.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- At home and work, clean phones, computer keyboards, and toys often with alcohol wipes.
- If possible, avoid close contact with others, especially if 2009 H1N1 flu cases have been identified in the area where you live or work.

This information is not intended as a substitute for professional medical care. Always follow your healthcare professional's instructions.

- Wearing a medical facemask to prevent the 2009 H1N1 flu is generally not necessary for persons who are not at increased risk of serious illness from this flu. For persons who are at increased risk, such as children 5 years and younger, persons 65 years and older, pregnant women, and other special groups (your doctor can tell you if you or your child are in such a group), a facemask worn over the mouth and nose may help protect against getting the 2009 H1N1 flu, if it is in your area. You and your child still need to follow the measures listed above to lessen the chance of getting the 2009 H1N1 flu.
- You and your child should still get the regular flu vaccine every year. Your healthcare provider can answer any questions you have about this.

Tips for Handwashing

Handwashing is one of the best ways to prevent the spread of 2009 H1N1 flu and other common infections. Follow these steps:

- Use warm water and plenty of soap. Work up a good lather.
- Clean the whole hand, under your nails, between your fingers, and up the wrists.
- Wash for at least 15 seconds. Don't just wipe—scrub well.
- Rinse, letting the water run down your fingers, not up your wrists.
- Dry your hands well. Use a paper towel to turn off the faucet and open the door.

Tips for Using Alcohol-Based Hand Gels

Alcohol-based hand gels are also a good choice for cleaning your hands. Use them when you don't have access to soap and water, or your hands aren't visibly dirty. Follow these steps:

- Squeeze about a tablespoon of gel into the palm of one hand.
- Rub your hands together briskly, cleaning the backs of your hands, the palms, between your fingers, and up the wrists.
- Rub until the gel is gone and your hands are completely dry.

To Learn More About H1N1 Flu

Visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website: