

2009 H1N1 Flu Update for Parents

Adapted from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), September 2009

Q: *What is the current status of 2009 H1N1 Influenza?*

A: The 2009 H1N1 flu continues to circulate. We have seen an increase of cases with the beginning of the school year. Most cases to date in the U.S. have been among persons 5 to 24 years old. Most people get better without seeing a doctor; however, there are some who experience complications.

Q: *Who is at increased risk of complications from the 2009 H1N1 virus?*

A: Pregnant women, children less than 5 years old; persons whose immune systems are compromised; persons with underlying medical conditions (such as diabetes, chronic lung disease, asthma and heart disease); and children with neurodevelopmental conditions have a higher risk of complications. People 65 years and older are at increased risk from influenza but so far have been less affected by this novel flu virus.

Q: *What about a vaccine?*

A: The best way to protect against the flu is to get a yearly vaccine. This year the CDC recommends two different flu vaccines for everyone over the age of 6 months: one against the seasonal flu strains, available now, the other to protect persons from the 2009 H1N1 flu, expected to be available mid-October. The CDC recommends that certain groups of the population receive the 2009 H1N1 vaccine when it first becomes available. They include:

- pregnant women
- people who live with or care for children younger than 6 months of age
- healthcare and emergency medical services personnel
- persons between the ages of 6 months and 24 years old
- people ages of 25 through 64 years of age with chronic health disorders or compromised immune systems.

As vaccine supply increases and demand among priority groups is met, the CDC recommends that other adults receive the 2009 H1N1 vaccine.

Q: *What should I do if I have flu symptoms?*

A: If you or a family member has fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headaches, chills, and fatigue (sometimes with vomiting or diarrhea), follow these basic steps:

- **Call the doctor.** He/she will let you know whether you need to be seen and/or whether you need medication.
- **Stay home** until at least 24 hours after you have no fever (100° F) or signs of a fever without the use of fever-reducing medications.
- **Get plenty of rest.**
- **Drink clear fluids**, such as water, broth or sports drinks to keep from becoming dehydrated.
- **Limit contact with others** as much as possible. Stay in a room separate from common areas of the house if possible.
- **Do not give a child younger than 18 years any aspirin** or products that contain aspirin; children 5 years and older can take Tylenol®, Advil®, Motrin® or Nuprin®.
- **Use a cool-mist humidifier and suction bulb** to help clear away mucus for children younger than 2 years of age.

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(continued)

Q: *When should I get my child to the doctor or the Emergency Room?*

A: Seek urgent care right away if your child has one of the following:

- 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 he or she does not want to be held
- Flu-like symptoms that improve but then return with fever and worse cough

Q: *What can my family do to prevent the spread of flu?*

A: Basic hygiene can help stop the spread of flu:

- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw your used tissues in the trash can.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after coughing or sneezing.
- Use alcohol-based hand sanitizer if you cannot wash your hands. Put a dollop on the palm; rub all over hands until they are dry.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread that way.

Q: *How safe is hand sanitizer for my young child?*

A: Community-based studies have shown that alcohol-based hand sanitizers are effective in reducing illness in households and lowering absenteeism in schools. They are safe when used correctly. A two-year old would need to ingest 4-5 teaspoons of hand sanitizer to produce toxic effects requiring medical attention. As always, close supervision of young children is needed when using this product. (Maryland Poison Center, University of Maryland School of Pharmacy, www.mdpoison)

Q: *How is the health department working with schools to prepare for the 2009 H1N1 flu?*

A: The health department has been communicating with area schools about developing plans for widespread illness. It has been collaborating with and educating administrators and school nurses about: 1) steps to take for students and staff with flu symptoms; 2) vaccination; 3) infection control; and 4) preparing in the event that the flu causes large numbers of students and staff to be absent.

Q: *Where can I get more information?*

- A:**
- For the most current information, check out the CDC website: www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu.
 - Ask H1N1 flu questions on-line at the Virginia Department of Health website: www.vdh.virginia.gov or call its toll free H1N1 hotline, Mondays through Fridays, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at 1-877-ASK-VDH3 (1-877-275-8343).

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