

September 15, 2009

Information about novel H1N1 (swine) and seasonal flu for parents and families

What is novel H1N1 (swine) flu?

- Like the seasonal flu, novel H1N1 is a type of influenza that causes respiratory disease and spreads easily from person to person through coughing, sneezing or touching objects with the virus on them.
- Unlike the seasonal flu, novel H1N1 is a new strain of influenza. Most people don't have immunity to it, so more people will get sick when exposed to the virus.

What symptoms should you look for?

People with novel H1N1 flu develop the common symptoms of respiratory illness, including

- Fever of over 100 degrees Fahrenheit
- Persistent cough
- Sore throat
- Body aches and/or headache
- Chills
- Diarrhea and vomiting

What can I do if my child or a family member gets sick?

- Keep your child and other sick family members at home except to seek medical care. Updated guidelines from the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommend that those with symptoms of the flu should stay home until 24 hours after their fever ends without the aid of fever-reducing medicines.
- Have acetaminophen (e.g., Tylenol® or other store brand) and ibuprofen (e.g., Advil®, Motrin® or other store brand) on hand to reduce the fever and pain associated with a sore throat, headache and achy muscles. CHILDREN SHOULD NOT USE ASPIRIN, which can cause Reye's syndrome in children and teenagers.
- Make sure sick family members drink lots of fluids like juice, water, Pedialyte®, popsicles and Jell-O®.
- Contact your health-care provider if your child's symptoms are severe or get worse.
- Wash your hands frequently when taking care of sick family members.

When should I seek emergency care? In children, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Bluish or gray skin color
- Confusion, 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 a 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 or not interacting normally
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and a worse cough

What can I do to protect family members from getting the flu?

- Remind children and others to cough or sneeze into tissue or their sleeves, and then to throw away the soiled tissues and wash their hands.
- Encourage and reward frequent hand washing with soap and water. Use hand sanitizers if water is not available, but keep alcohol-based sanitizers out of reach of children when an adult is not present.
- Remind family members to wash their hands long enough to sing the “Happy Birthday” song twice — about 15 to 30 seconds — and make it a habit to do so
 - ✓ after sneezing or blowing their noses
 - ✓ before and after eating
 - ✓ after using the bathroom
 - ✓ when their hands appear soiled
 - ✓ and at regular intervals throughout the day

What else can you do?

- Model and talk about good hygiene.
- Remind family members to avoid touching their mouths, eyes and noses when possible.
- Discourage family members from sharing bottles, food, cups, utensils and other personal items.
- Talk to your employer in advance about leave policies.
- Stock the supplies you need to take care of sick family members ahead of time.
- Get everyone in the family immunized as soon as the vaccine becomes available.

For up to date information about novel H1N1 flu, influenza and flu vaccines in Alaska, go to <http://www.pandemicflu.alaska.gov/>.

Look for more guidelines and information for parents and families at <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/parents/>.