

Influenza: Facts on Prevention and Vaccination

Hoag Hospital's first priority is the safety of patients, staff and visitors. Hoag is strictly enforcing Orange County Health Care Agency and California Department of Public Health recommendations to prevent the spread of H1N1 (Swine Flu). If you have a fever, sore throat and/or cough, you are strongly advised not to visit a patient.

Below are answers to frequently asked questions concerning H1N1 (Swine Flu) and seasonal flu. Use the prevention tips on the back to protect yourself and others from catching the flu.

What is H1N1 (Swine Flu)?

H1N1 (Swine Flu) is a new virus first seen in the United States. It is contagious and spreads from person to person. Like seasonal influenza (flu), illness in people with H1N1 can vary from mild to severe.

What should I do if I get sick with flu-like symptoms?

If you become ill with influenza-like symptoms, which includes fever, body aches, runny or stuffy nose, sore throat, nausea, vomiting or diarrhea, stay home and avoid contact with other people.

Stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone (100°F or 37.8°C) and not using a medicine to reduce fever.

When should I see my doctor or go to the hospital?

Some people are more likely to get flu complications and they should talk to their health care provider about whether they need to be examined if they get flu symptoms. Check with your doctor if you are in one of these groups:

- Children younger than five, but especially children younger than two years old
- People 65 and older
- Pregnant women
- People with chronic medical conditions such as: diabetes, chronic lung disease, cancer, blood disorders, heart disease, weakened immune system, kidney, liver, neurological or neuromuscular disorders

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
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough

In children, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish skin color
- Fever with a rash
- Difficulty in waking up or not interacting
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough

How long can an infected person spread H1N1 (swine) flu to others?

People with H1N1 influenza virus infection should be considered potentially contagious as long as they have flu symptoms and possibly for up to seven or more days following the start of illness.

What are antiviral drugs and how will they help?

Antiviral drugs are prescription medicines (pills, liquid or an inhaler) that can be used for prevention or treatment of flu viruses. If you get sick, antiviral drugs can make your illness milder. The sooner a sick person is treated with an antiviral, the greater effect it will have on the patient's recovery. Laboratory tests have shown that H1N1 (Swine Flu) viruses are susceptible to Oseltamivir (TAMIFLU®) and Zanamivir (RELENZA®). Speak with a health care provider to determine if you need an antiviral prescription.

Is it unsafe for pregnant or breastfeeding women to get flu vaccinations?

It is safe and important for pregnant women or those who are breastfeeding to be vaccinated in order to prevent complications that may result from the flu.

Who is most at risk for getting H1N1?

Those at high-risk for developing complications are recommended to get the H1N1 vaccine. These groups include:

- Pregnant women
- Caregivers in contact with children younger than six months of age (e.g. parents, siblings, and child care providers)
- Health care and emergency medical services personnel
- Persons from six months to 24 years of age
- People aged 25 to 64 years with medical conditions associated with a higher risk of flu complications (e.g. asthma, diabetes)

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Who should get vaccinated for the seasonal flu?

Anyone who wants to reduce the likelihood of becoming ill with influenza or spreading influenza to others should get a seasonal flu shot. Immunization is 70-90 percent effective in preventing influenza in healthy adults.

People at high risk for flu complications include:

- Children younger than five
- Adults 65 years of age and older
- Pregnant women
- Health care providers
- People who have chronic medical conditions or compromised immune systems

Can you get the flu from the vaccine?

No, the vaccine shot cannot give you the flu as it contains inactivated (or killed) virus strains. The shot may cause side effects such as soreness, redness, or swelling where the shot was given, low-grade fever or aches. If someone develops respiratory symptoms after they received the vaccine they were most likely infected at the time of the vaccination.

What is the nasal-spray (FluMist®) flu vaccine?

The nasal spray vaccine is administered through the nose and consists of a low dose of live, but weakened, flu viruses. The spray is generally only recommended for healthy individuals as the person who receives it can continue to shed influenza virus for a few days. The flu nasal spray is easy to take, which is why children and some adults may prefer the spray to getting a flu shot. The nasal spray is approved for use in healthy people aged 2-49 who are not pregnant.

Prevention Checklist

1. Get the flu shot

Flu vaccine is the best option for preventing illness from influenza

2. Frequently wash your hands and/or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer

Wash with soap and clean running water for 15 seconds or rub hands vigorously with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

3. Cover when you cough or sneeze

- Cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze into the crook of your arm or into a tissue.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth, which are vulnerable ports of entry for the virus.

4. Keep your distance

- Influenza is highly contagious. It is spread by contact (coughing, sneezing, touching contaminated items, sharing beverages, utensils, etc.)
- Limit close contacts
- Don't come to work if you have flu symptoms such as fever, cough, muscle aches
- Distance yourself and family from crowds during the flu season, cleaning your hands frequently when in public places

5. Pass the information on

Educate your family, friends and coworkers about the flu and its effects

6. Clean things that are touched frequently

Such as doorknobs, phones, keyboards

7. Take care of your health

Eat a balanced diet, get proper amounts of sleep and exercise regularly.

Resources

www.flu.gov

For more information on where to get vaccinated, call 1-800-564-8448 or visit www.ohealthinfo.com/public/

H1N1 Vaccine Update: <http://ohealthinfo.com/h1n1/#Vaccine>

For Hoag patient and visitor information visit www.hoaghospital.org/pvinfo



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