

Pandemic H1N1 Flu (Swine Flu) & Older Adults: What You Should Know

What is Pandemic H1N1 flu (formerly known as swine flu)?

Pandemic H1N1 flu is a respiratory infection caused by a new strain of flu virus responsible for outbreaks in many parts of the world. It has led to many hospitalizations and some deaths in certain parts of the United States.

Is Pandemic H1N1 flu the same as the seasonal flu?

No. Every year, different strains of flu viruses spread in our communities and cause the seasonal flu. The Pandemic H1N1 flu is caused by a new strain of flu virus that first appeared in the United States in the spring of 2009. Both the Pandemic H1N1 and seasonal flu can be serious.

How is Pandemic H1N1 flu spread?

Flu viruses are most often spread directly from person-to-person through droplets from a sick person when they cough or sneeze. However, you can also become infected with Pandemic H1N1 flu by touching your eyes, nose, or mouth after touching a surface such as a table, faucet or doorknob that has been contaminated by the flu virus.

What are the symptoms of Pandemic H1N1 flu?

Many of the symptoms of Pandemic H1N1 flu are the same as the symptoms of the seasonal flu. These include fever, dry cough, sore throat, stuffy nose, body aches, headache, and tiredness. The Pandemic H1N1 flu may also cause diarrhea and vomiting and can lead to serious complications for some people, including people with chronic medical conditions like asthma, lung disease, heart disease, diabetes or weakened immune systems.

How serious is Pandemic H1N1 flu?

Most people will recover from the Pandemic H1N1 flu without treatment. However, just like the seasonal flu, Pandemic H1N1 flu can lead to serious health problems. Pregnant women; adults younger than 25 years of age; young children; and people with underlying health conditions such as asthma, lung disease, heart disease, diabetes, and kidney disease, are more likely to catch the flu, spread the flu, and have flu complications.

Is the Pandemic H1N1 flu more serious for older adults?

Unlike seasonal flu, there have been few cases of Pandemic H1N1 flu among adults over 65 years of age. This may be because older adults were exposed to a similar H1N1 virus in the past and have some immunity (ability to recognize and fight off the virus). Older adults are less likely to get Pandemic H1N1 flu. However, if older adults do get sick with the Pandemic H1N1 flu, they are at high risk for complications, just as they are with seasonal flu. That's why it is important that adults 65 years of age or older contact their healthcare provider quickly if they have flu-like symptoms. All older adults should take steps to prevent the flu, such as washing their hands often and avoiding contact with people who may have the flu. In addition, when more Pandemic H1N1 vaccine is available later in the fall, all older adults can get vaccinated.

How is Pandemic H1N1 flu treated?

People 65 years of age and older and anyone with chronic health conditions like heart or lung disease, asthma, diabetes, or weakened immune systems who have flu-like symptoms should contact their healthcare provider right away. Their healthcare provider may prescribe an antiviral medication. Antiviral medication can make your illness milder, make symptoms last a shorter period of time, and prevent more serious flu complications.

Just like with seasonal flu, lots of fluids and plenty of rest away from work or school are recommended. You may take acetaminophen (Tylenol®), aspirin* (acetylsalicylic acid), ibuprofen (Motrin®, Advil®), or naproxen (Aleve®) for fever and body aches. **Aspirin should not be used by children 15 and under who may be sick with the flu.*

[> more](#)

Is there a vaccine to prevent Pandemic H1N1 flu and the seasonal flu?

This year, there are two different flu vaccines. One can prevent the Pandemic H1N1 flu and the other, the seasonal flu.

Should older adults get the Pandemic H1N1 flu vaccine?

The Pandemic H1N1 vaccine is not yet available for older adults, because they are less likely to get this particular strain of flu. However, it is available for older adults who:

- Are younger than 65 years of age and have a chronic medical condition.
- Live with or care for an infant younger than 6 months of age.
- Are emergency medical services personnel or health care workers.

When more vaccine is available later in the fall, it will be available to all older adults.

How about the seasonal flu vaccine? Should older adults get this vaccine?

A seasonal flu vaccine won't protect you from Pandemic H1N1 flu but is very effective in preventing complications from the seasonal flu. The seasonal flu vaccine is recommended for all adults age 50 and older and all adults with certain chronic health conditions because they are more likely to have serious complications from the flu. Talk to your doctor about getting the seasonal flu vaccine today. To find a no-cost or low-cost flu vaccination clinic, visit www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/ip or call 2-1-1.

How else can I protect my family from the flu?

Following some simple, everyday tips can help protect you and your family from the flu.

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water and/or use gel sanitizers.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth since germs spread that way.
- Avoid close contact with sick people. If you're sick, stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever ends.
- Ask your doctor about the pneumococcal vaccine, which can prevent pneumococcal disease, a severe flu complication.

Family members who are vaccinated are less likely to catch the flu and to pass it on to you.

Encourage your family members to get their Pandemic H1N1 vaccine if they:
are pregnant; live with or care for infants under 6 months of age; are healthcare workers or emergency medical personnel;
are between 6 months and 24 years; or are younger than 65 years of age with a chronic medical condition.

For more information

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

(800) CDC-INFO or (800) 232-4636

www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/

California Department of Public Health

(888) 865-0564

www.cdph.ca.gov

Los Angeles County Department of Public Health

www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/H1N1

Health Care Services: Dial 2-1-1

DPH Update Listserv: Email Listserv@listserv.ph.lacounty.gov

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