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# What to Do If You Get Flu-Like Symptoms

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## Background

The novel H1N1 flu virus is causing illness in infected persons in the United States and countries around the world. CDC expects that illnesses may continue for some time. As a result, you or people around you may become ill. If so, you need to recognize the symptoms and know what to do.



## Symptoms

The symptoms of this new H1N1 flu virus in people are similar to the symptoms of seasonal flu and include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. A significant number of people who have been infected with this new H1N1 virus also have reported diarrhea and vomiting. The high risk groups for novel H1N1 flu are not known at this time but it's possible that they may be the same as for seasonal influenza. People at higher risk of serious complications from seasonal flu include people age 65 years and older, children younger than 5 years old, pregnant women, people of any age with chronic medical conditions (such as asthma, diabetes, or heart disease), and people who are immunosuppressed (e.g., taking immunosuppressive medications, infected with HIV).

## Avoid Contact With Others

If you are sick, you may be ill for a week or longer. You should stay home and avoid contact with other persons, except to seek medical care. If you leave the house to seek medical care, wear a mask or cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue. In general you should avoid contact with other people as much as possible to keep from spreading your illness. At the current time, CDC believes that this virus has the same properties in terms of spread as seasonal flu viruses. With seasonal flu, studies have shown that people may be contagious from one day before they develop symptoms to up to 7 days after they get sick. Children, especially younger children, might potentially be contagious for longer periods.

## Treatment is Available for Those Who Are Seriously Ill



It is expected that most people will recover without needing medical care.

If you have severe illness or you are at high risk for flu complications, contact your health care provider or seek

medical care. Your health care provider will determine whether flu testing or treatment is needed. Be aware that if the flu becomes wide spread, there will be little need to continue testing people, so your health care provider may decide not to test for the flu virus.

Antiviral drugs can be given to treat those who become severely ill with influenza. These antiviral drugs are prescription medicines (pills, liquid or an inhaler) with activity against influenza viruses, including H1N1 flu virus. These medications must be prescribed by a health care professional.

There are two influenza antiviral medications that are recommended for use against H1N1 flu. The drugs that are used for treating H1N1 flu are called oseltamivir (trade name Tamiflu ®) and zanamivir (Relenza ®). As the H1N1 flu spreads, these antiviral drugs may become in short supply. Therefore, the drugs will be given first to those people who have been hospitalized or are at high risk of complications. The drugs work best if given within 2 days of becoming ill, but may be given later if illness is severe or for those at a high risk for complications.

Aspirin or aspirin-containing products (e.g. bismuth subsalicylate – Pepto Bismol) should not be administered to any confirmed or suspected ill case of novel influenza A (H1N1) virus infection aged 18 years old and younger due to the risk of Reye syndrome. For relief of fever, other anti-pyretic medications are recommended such as acetaminophen or non steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs. For more information about Reye’s syndrome, visit the [National Institute of Health website](#).

- Check ingredient labels on over-the-counter cold and flu medications to see if they contain aspirin.
- Teenagers with the flu can take medicines *without* aspirin, such as acetaminophen (Tylenol®) and ibuprofen (Advil®, Motrin®, Nuprin®), to relieve symptoms.
- Children younger than 4 years of age should not be given over-the-counter cold medications without first speaking with a healthcare provider.

## **Emergency Warning Signs**

If you become ill and experience any of the following warning signs, seek emergency medical care.

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

- 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 the child does not want to be held
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and 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
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough

## **Protect Yourself, Your Family, and Community**

- Stay informed. Health officials will provide additional information as it becomes available. Visit the [CDC H1N1 Flu website](#).
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- If you are sick with a flu-like illness, stay home for 7 days after your symptoms begin or until you have been symptom-free for 24 hours, whichever is longer. Keep away from other household members as much as possible. This is to keep you from infecting others and spreading the virus further.
- Learn more about how to take care of someone who is ill in "[Taking Care of a Sick Person in Your Home](#)"
- Follow public health advice regarding school closures, avoiding crowds, and other social distancing measures.
- If you don't have one yet, consider developing a family emergency plan as a precaution. This should include storing a supply of extra food, medicines, and other essential supplies. Further information can be found in the "[Flu Planning Checklist](#)"

