

Home Care Tips for H1N1 (Swine Flu)

Symptoms of H1N1 (swine flu)

Like seasonal flu, H1N1 can cause fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills, fatigue, diarrhea and vomiting. Flu symptoms vary from mild to severe. Groups more likely to have severe flu include pregnant women and people with chronic medical conditions.

Help stop the spread of germs

Flu spreads from person to person through coughing, sneezing or touching infected objects. Infection occurs when the flu virus gets into someone's airway, lungs or eyes. To help stop the spread of germs:

- 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 with soap and water frequently, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
- If you get sick, stay home and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.

Home care recommendations

If you get sick with flu:

- Stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone (without the use of fever-reducing medicine). In general, a fever means you have a temperature of 100 degrees Fahrenheit (37.8 degrees Celsius) or greater.
- Drink clear fluids (water, broth, sports drinks, electrolyte beverages for infants) to avoid dehydration.
- Get plenty of rest.
- If possible, limit your contact with other people.

If you are the caregiver for someone with flu:

- Throw away tissues and other disposable items used by the sick person.
- Wash your hands after touching used tissues and similar waste.

- Avoid being face to face with the sick person.
- Monitor yourself and other household members for flu symptoms.

Antiviral medications

There are two main antiviral medications that may be effective in reducing the severity and duration of flu symptoms. They are called Tamiflu and Relenza and can be prescribed only by a physician. Most people do not need these antiviral drugs to fully recover from the flu; however, those at higher risk for severe flu complications might benefit from antiviral medications. Contact your health care provider for more information.

Cleaning and disinfecting surfaces

To help prevent the spread of germs in your house:

- Keep hard surfaces like kitchen countertops, desktops and bathroom surfaces clean and disinfected.
- Keep surfaces touched by more than one person clean and disinfected. Examples of these surfaces include doorknobs, refrigerator door handles and microwaves.
- Use disposable sanitizer cloths to wipe electronic items that are touched often, such as phones, computers, remote controls and hand-held games.

When to seek emergency medical care

Call your local emergency number or 9-1-1 right away if the sick person at home:

- Has difficulty breathing or chest pain.
- Has purple or blue discoloration of the lips.
- Is vomiting and unable to keep liquids down.
- Has signs of dehydration such as dizziness when standing, no need to urinate, or in infants, lack of tears when crying.
- Has a seizure.

For more information

- Washington State Department of Health's H1N1 (swine flu) Web site at www.doh.wa.gov/h1n1/
- Federal government's site at www.flu.gov