

Flu FAQs *Frequently Asked Questions for Seasonal and H1N1 Flu*



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Flu is unpredictable and activity can rise and fall throughout the season, but flu is likely to continue for months caused by either 2009 H1N1 viruses or regular seasonal flu viruses. This white paper will address frequently asked questions with regards to the seasonal and H1N1 flu.

Seasonal Flu FAQs:

What is the flu and what are symptoms?

The flu, also known as influenza, is a respiratory disease affecting the nose, throat, and lungs. It spreads from person to person by coughing, sneezing, or touching something with flu viruses on it prior to touching your mouth or nose area. A person can be infected days before showing symptoms, meaning that person can spread the flu without even knowing it. Common symptoms include fever, headaches, overtiredness, coughing, sore throat, nasal congestion, body aches and pains

How can I prevent getting the flu?

Individuals can practice every day flu prevention habits such as washing hands frequently, covering their mouth when sneezing, and avoiding close contact with potentially infected individuals. Another convenient and inexpensive way to avoid the flu is to get vaccinated. Individuals are vaccinated by injection in a quick process that takes nearly 15 minutes.

Is the flu vaccination necessary?

The flu shot is the easiest way to avoid getting the flu. The flu vaccination is made from influenza viruses that have been killed and will not infect you. Some individuals develop side effects after receiving the vaccine including minor influenza symptoms. Those with medical allergies must be wary because the vaccine is a medicine and may cause an allergic reaction. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) identifies target groups that should opt for the vaccination. These groups include:

- People over 50 years old
- Pregnant women
- People with chronic conditions that could be worsened by the flu virus
- Health care workers
- People who live in nursing homes and long-term care facilities
- Young children

However, anyone over the age of 6 months may benefit from the vaccination. Each year flu strains are different, so a vaccination from last year will not protect you this year. Also, the seasonal flu vaccination will not protect you from the H1N1 swine flu virus.

William Gallagher Associates is a leading provider of insurance brokerage, risk management and employee benefits services to firms with complex risks, within industries that include technology, life sciences, financial risks, health care, aviation, energy, and environmental services. WGA has offices in Boston, MA; New York, NY; Hartford, CT; Princeton, NJ; Columbia, MD; Atlanta, GA; and Paris, France.

I may have a seasonal flu, what do I do?

The CDC advises people who have flu symptoms to stay home for 24 hours after their fever disappears (100°C) without the assistance of medications. This applies to people exposed to high risk transmission areas such as college campuses, the work place, schools, camps, mass gatherings, or large community settings. If symptoms worsen, consult a doctor.

Swine Flu (H1N1) FAQs:

What is the difference between the seasonal flu and the swine flu (H1N1)?

The swine flu is a strain of virus that pigs contract and transmit. The swine flu of interest in 2009 is the H1N1 strain, which can be passed from pigs to human beings. It was first identified in pigs in 1930. Now it is causing illness in humans, with the potential of reaching pandemic levels. The official, scientific name for swine flu, its serologic classification, is H1N1 Influenza A. The H means hemagglutinin and the N means neuraminidase and the 1s refer to their antibody type. Influenza A is a genus of the Orthomyxoviridae family of viruses, and refers to the fact that the virus is first identified in an animal, usually a pig or a bird. When put together, they describe the 2009-2010 swine flu virus.

Why is this flu different from others?

There are thousands of different kinds of viruses that can cause the flu. New strains develop frequently and each one is different from the one before it. The seasonal flu is actually comprised of several different strains of flu. Swine flu is a new, different strain, as described above.

How is the swine flu transmitted?

The swine flu is transmitted just the way any viral disease is transmitted -- person-to-person contact, by touching something someone with a virus has already touched, or from droplets in the air which come from a sneeze or a cough of a person who has the swine flu.

What are the symptoms of swine flu?

Symptoms of swine flu are the same as typical flu symptoms. Fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue are the most prevalent symptoms. Some patients report diarrhea and vomiting, too.

I got a seasonal flu shot. Am I protected?

Health officials say that a seasonal flu shot (which addresses different strains of flu) will not protect us from the swine flu. The seasonal flu shot was developed to combat strains that are not related to the swine flu strain, H1N1. If you get a flu shot in 2009, be sure to ask clearly which vaccine(s) you are receiving -- swine flu or seasonal flu.

Is there a Swine Flu vaccine available? When can I get it?

The swine flu vaccine is still in production and will not be readily available to all populations. The CDC Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices has made recommendations as to who should receive the swine flu vaccine. Distribution of the vaccine will be handled at the state level.

Categories of individuals who should get the swine flu vaccine are:

- Pregnant women
- Caregivers for children under the age of 6 months (since small children cannot be vaccinated)
- Healthcare and emergency professionals
- Children aged 6 months through 18 years of age (since they tend to be in large group settings such as daycares and schools)
- Young adults aged 19 to 24 years of age (since they are a mobile population often living and working in close proximity)
- People age 25 to 64 with health conditions associated with higher risk of medical complications from influenza

How can I prevent the swine flu?

There are obvious everyday precautions that can help prevent the spread of germs.

- Wash hands often, for at least 20 seconds, instruct your family members to do the same
- Use hand sanitizers (with at least 60% alcohol) in addition to hand-washing
- Avoid touching your mouth, nose and eyes
- Stay hydrated
- Avoid close contact with other people

Employees should also practice social distancing, a distance of 3-6 feet is recommended as a protective distance from someone that may have the virus and is coughing or sneezing.

If I think I have the swine flu, what should I do?

If an employee finds themselves with flu-like symptoms, they should contact a doctor's office immediately and stay home from work or school. It may be the swine flu, or it could be seasonal flu, or any upper respiratory problem.

There are some prescription drugs that a doctor may recommend that can make the illness easier to tolerate, and may help you avoid complications. Those drugs must be started within 48 hours of symptoms onset to be effective. Take the obvious precautions like make sure you cover your mouth and nose if you cough or sneeze using a tissue or your sleeve -- not your hands.

