

Primary News Update

APRIL 30th, 2009

H1N1 Influenza A

(formerly known as the swine flu)

A lot of concern has arisen this past week over the outbreak of the H1N1 flu in Mexico and the United States. As of today, there are 116 confirmed cases in the U.S. in 15 states. The World Health Organization has raised the pandemic level to a level 5 on a scale of 1-6 which means there is documented human to human transmission in at least two countries in one region. Level 6 is a global pandemic characterized by wide spread outbreaks in more than one region.

Special
REPORT



HOURS

MONDAY - FRIDAY
8am-8pm

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270.759.9200

What is H1N1 flu?

H1N1 flu is a respiratory disease caused by type A influenza viruses. Despite these relatively small numbers, physicians and patients need to be aware of this potential life-threatening illness. The current recommendation from the Kentucky Department of Public Health is to enhance the surveillance for the presence of H1N1 flu in Kentucky. The annual flu season is totally concluded in Kentucky. The recommendation for patients that should be checked for H1N1 flu are:

1. Patients who test positive for Influenza A on a rapid flu test.
2. A patient with acute respiratory illness (recent onset of at least two of the following: runny nose, nasal congestion, sore throat, cough (with or without fever or feverishness).
3. A patient with acute respiratory illness who was in close contact to a confirmed case of swine flu during the case's infectious period.
4. A patient with an acute respiratory illness who traveled to an area where there are confirmed cases of H1N1 influenza within 7 days of illness onset.

Close contact is defined as within 6 feet of an ill person who is a confirmed or suspected case of H1N1 flu during the case's infectious period.

How is it spread?

H1N1 influenza A is spread by direct human to human contact. It is not known how easily the spread occurs. Just as the common flu

is passed along, H1N1 flu is thought to be spread by coughing, sneezing, or touching something that has the live virus on it.

If infected, a person may be able to infect another person one day before symptoms develop; therefore, a person is able to pass the flu on before they know they are sick. Infected individuals may spread the virus for seven or more days after becoming sick. Those with H1N1 flu should be considered potentially contagious as long as they are showing symptoms, and up to seven days or longer from the onset of their illness. Children might be contagious for longer periods of time.

Can I catch swine flu from eating pork?

No. Today's latest knowledge does not suggest the flu has anything to do with pigs or pork.

What are the symptoms of H1N1 flu?

Symptoms of H1N1 flu are similar to those of a regular flu: fever and chills, sore throat, cough, headache, body aches, and fatigue. Diarrhea and vomiting can also be present. Without a specific lab test, it is impossible to know whether you may be suffering from H1N1 flu or another flu strain, or a different disease entirely.

What precautionary measures should I take?

The same everyday precautions that you take to prevent other contagious viruses should be used to protect yourself against H1N1 flu. The best current advice is for individuals to practice good hand hygiene. Periodic hand washing with soap and water, or the use of an alcohol-based hand sanitizer when hand washing is not possible is a good preventive measure. Also, avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth, as germs can more easily gain entrance into your body through those areas. Covering your mouth with a disposable tissue when you cough and sneeze is also a good practice.

The CDC recommends avoiding contact with sick people and keeping your own good health in check with adequate sleep, exercise, and a nutritious diet.

What should you do if you think you are sick with the H1N1 flu?

Contact your health care professional, inform them of your symptoms, and ask whether you should be tested for H1N1 flu. Be prepared to give details on how long you've been feeling ill and about any recent travels. Your health care provider will determine whether influenza testing or treatment is needed. If you feel sick, but are not sure what illness you may have, stay home until you have been diagnosed properly to avoid spreading any infection.



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Watch for these symptoms in children. Seek emergency medical care if your child experiences any of the following warning signs:

- Fever with a rash
- Dehydration
- Fast breathing
- Bluish skin coloration
- Slow to wake or sluggish interaction
- Flu-like symptoms improve, but then return and cough worsens
- Severe irritability

For adults, emergency medical care is needed if you experience these warning signs:

- Difficulty breathing
- Dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Pain or pressure in the chest or stomach

Remember that the symptoms for swine flu are almost identical to those you might experience with the regular flu. Only your doctor can give you the correct diagnosis.

Are there medicines effective in treating H1N1 flu in humans?

The current strain of the H1N1 flu appears to respond to the use of oseltamivir (Tamiflu), or zanamivir (Relenza) for those infected. For treatment, these antiviral drugs work best if started soon after getting sick (within two days of the appearance of symptoms), and for that reason, it's important to notify your health care provider right away if your symptoms are severe.

Is there a vaccine available to protect against H1N1 flu?

No, there is no vaccine to protect humans from this new strain of H1N1 flu. Steps have been taken to start developing one, though the process is complex and can take months.



Would a recent vaccination for the seasonal flu help protect against H1N1 flu?

The CDC reports that those individuals who received the seasonal flu vaccine do not have added protection against the H1N1 flu. The common seasonal human influenza viruses are very different from the H1N1 viruses responsible for the recent outbreaks of H1N1 flu. Therefore, a seasonal flu vaccine would not protect against the H1N1 flu.

I hope that this information has been helpful and informative. If you have any of the above criteria or symptoms which are present or if you have questions regarding this information, you should make an appointment to see your physician as soon as possible.

*Robert C. Hughes, M.D.
Primary Care Medical Center*