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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 novel 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 novel H1N1 flu 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 keep away from others as much as possible, including avoiding travel and not going to work or school, for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone except to get medical care or for other necessities. (Your fever should be gone without the use of fever-reducing medicine.) If you leave the house to seek medical care, wear a facemask, if available and tolerable, and 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, especially people at increased risk of severe illness from influenza. With seasonal flu, 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. People infected with the novel H1N1 are likely to have similar patterns of infectiousness as with seasonal flu.

## 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 widespread, less testing will be needed, 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 novel 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 novel H1N1 flu. The drugs that are used for treating novel H1N1 flu are called oseltamivir (trade name Tamiflu®) and zanamivir (Relenza®). As the novel H1N1 flu spreads, these antiviral drugs may become in short supply. Therefore, the drugs may be given first to those people who have been hospitalized or are at high risk of severe illness from flu. 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's syndrome. For relief of fever, other anti-pyretic medications are recommended such as acetaminophen

# CDC urges you to take 3 action steps to protect against the flu.

## #1

### Take time to get vaccinated.

- CDC recommends a yearly seasonal flu vaccine as the first and most important step in protecting against seasonal flu.
- The seasonal flu vaccine protects against the three seasonal viruses that research suggests will be most common.
- Vaccination is especially important for people at high risk of serious flu complications, including young children, pregnant women, people with chronic health conditions like asthma, diabetes or heart and lung disease and people 65 years and older.
- Seasonal flu vaccine also is important for health care workers, and other people who live with or care for high risk people to prevent giving the flu to those at high risk.
- A seasonal vaccine will not protect you against novel H1N1.
- A new vaccine against novel H1N1 is being produced and will be available in the coming months as an option for prevention of novel H1N1 infection.

People at greatest risk for novel H1N1 infection include children, pregnant women, and people with chronic health conditions like asthma, diabetes or heart and lung disease.



## #2

### Take everyday preventive actions.

- 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 flu-like illness, CDC recommends that you stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone except to get medical care or for other necessities. (Your fever should be gone without the use of a fever-reducing medicine.) Keep away from others as much as possible. This is to keep from making others sick.
- While sick, limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.

\*Though the scientific evidence is not as extensive as that on hand washing and alcohol-based sanitizers, other hand sanitizers that do not contain alcohol may be useful for killing flu germs on hands in settings where alcohol-based products are prohibited.



## #3

### Take flu antiviral drugs if recommended.

- If you get seasonal or novel H1N1 flu, antiviral drugs can treat the flu.
- Antiviral drugs are prescription medicines (pills, liquid or an inhaled powder) that fight against the flu by keeping flu viruses from reproducing in your body.
- Antiviral drugs can make your illness milder and make you feel better faster. They may also prevent serious flu complications.
- Antiviral drugs are not sold over-the-counter and are different from antibiotics.
- Antiviral drugs may be especially important for people who are very sick (hospitalized) or people who are sick with the flu and who are at increased risk of serious flu complications, such as pregnant women, young children and those with chronic health conditions.
- For treatment, antiviral drugs work best if started within the first 2 days of symptoms.

