

# H1N1 Flu (Swine Flu): A Guide for Individuals and Families Caring for Someone At Home

## H1N1 Flu

H1N1 flu is a respiratory disease caused by a new virus. It spreads easily among humans, especially the young. No one, except those who have been infected, is immune. Flu viruses spread through the droplets that come from your nose and mouth when you cough and sneeze. These tiny particles can be inhaled or transferred to others from hard surfaces such as door handles, telephones and remote controls.



H1N1 flu virus infection can cause a wide range of symptoms including:

- Fever greater than 100° F
- Cough, sore throat, runny nose
- Aches, chills, fatigue
- In some cases, diarrhea and vomiting

Like seasonal flu, H1N1 flu symptoms can vary from mild to severe. Some individuals, including pregnant women and those with chronic medical conditions such as asthma, diabetes or heart disease, may be at greater risk for developing a severe illness from H1N1 flu. Pregnant women and those with chronic medical conditions should contact their health care provider immediately when they have flu-like symptoms.

Most individuals who are sick with H1N1 flu may be safely cared for at home. The following information can help you provide safer care at home for sick family members during a flu outbreak.

## Preparation

Learn as much as you can about H1N1 flu and know where to go for the most current information. Sources of accurate information include:

- Your local county health department
- The Kansas Department of Health and Environment at <http://www.kdheks.gov>
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) at <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/>

Make a list of emergency health care contacts and keep it in a handy location.

Have a list of basic health information for each family member including:

- Name, date of birth
- Allergies
- Chronic medical conditions
- Other special health care needs

Keep a two-week supply of non-perishable food and beverages on hand.

- Canned goods, dry cereals and crackers
- Bottled water, fruit juices
- Baby food and formula

Stock up on health and household supplies.

- Prescription medications and over-the-counter drugs
- Necessary medical supplies for chronic health conditions like diabetes
- Medicines for fever such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen
- Fever thermometer
- Fluids to reduce the risk of dehydration, for example sports drinks for adults and teens and Pedialyte® or other generic electrolyte solution for children.
- Cleaning supplies, tissues, toilet paper and disposable diapers
- Cell phone and charger

Establish a network of “flu friends” who can help if you are sick.

### **Caring for someone with flu**

Someone who is sick with flu should get plenty of rest and drink plenty of fluids.

Keep sick individuals away from others.

- If possible, set up a sick room and designate a separate bathroom for those with flu. The room should have windows that open to circulate fresh air and a door that closes. Keep the door closed as much as possible.
- Designate one adult in the home to take care of a sick person. Avoid letting a pregnant woman care for a sick person. Pregnant women are at increased risk of severe flu and flu related complications.
- Other than caregivers, the sick person should not have visitors.
- If possible, the sick person should wear a surgical or protective mask anytime a caregiver enters the room.

### **Relieving the Symptoms of Flu**

Antiviral medications may help. To find out if you might benefit from antiviral medications contact your health care provider.

Treat fevers and aches with acetaminophen (Tylenol®) or ibuprofen (Advil®, Motrin®, Nuprin®).

**Warning! Do not give aspirin (acetylsalicylic acid) to children or teenagers who have flu; this can cause a rare but serious illness called Reyes Syndrome**

Over-the-counter cold and flu medications, used according to the package instructions, may help relieve some symptoms, such as cough and congestion.

- Check the ingredients on the package label to see if the medication already contains acetaminophen or ibuprofen before taking additional doses of these medications—don't double dose!
- Do not give children younger than 4 years of age over-the-counter cold medications without first speaking with a health care provider.
- The safest care for flu symptoms in children younger than 2 years of age is using a cool-mist humidifier and a suction bulb to help clear away mucus.



### Emergency medical care

Get medical care right away if you or a family member:

- 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, absence of urination or in infants lack of tears when they cry
- Has seizures (for example, uncontrolled convulsions), is less responsive than normal or becomes confused

### Protecting yourself and others in the home

Clean your hands frequently with soap and running water. Use an alcohol-based hand rub when soap and water are not available. Encourage everyone in the household to do the same. It is important to wash hands after coughing or sneezing, caring for a sick person or after touching something a sick person has come in contact with.

Use paper towels for drying hands after hand washing or use individual cloth towels for each member of the household (for example, have a different colored cloth towel for each person).

Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. Cough into your sleeve if a tissue isn't handy. Encourage everyone in the household to do the same.

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

Keep surfaces clean. Clean frequently touched surfaces like bedside tables, countertops, bathroom fixtures and shared items like toys and TV remotes daily and when visibly soiled.

Do not share linens, eating utensils and dishes.

- Wash linens, such as sheets and towels with laundry soap and tumble dry on a hot setting.
- Wash your hands with soap and water or alcohol-based hand rub after handling dirty laundry.
- Wash eating utensils and dishes in a dishwasher or by hand using hot water, soap and airing dry.



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