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NationwideChildrens.org

## H1N1 INFLUENZA (FLU) VIRUS

A new and very different influenza virus called "2009 H1N1" flu has emerged and is causing illness in people worldwide. This flu season may be more severe than usual because of the new H1N1 virus. Also, regular seasonal flu will continue to spread and cause illness.

Flu-like symptoms include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and feeling very tired. Children younger than 6 months may have fever, decreased activity, and poor appetite.

### WHO IS MOST AT RISK?

Children under 5 years of age and young adults are at greater risk of illness from this virus. This is different from seasonal flu which usually is most severe in children younger than 2 years and the elderly.

**Most otherwise healthy children who get this flu will not need medical treatment.** However, people who have one or more of the conditions listed below can have a more severe illness if they get the flu, including the H1N1 influenza virus.

- Blood disorders (including sickle cell disease)
- Chronic lung disease (including asthma or other lung disease)
- Pregnancy
- Diabetes, kidney, heart or liver disease; cancer
- Disorders of the nervous system, brain or spinal cord
- Neuromuscular disorders (including muscular dystrophy and multiple sclerosis)
- People with weakened immune systems (including people with AIDS or those who are receiving chemotherapy)



**Picture 1** Washing hands often is one of the best ways to prevent the spread of the flu virus.

If you or your child has any of these health conditions and develops flu-like symptoms, call your health care provider or seek medical care. Unless your child's doctor says not to, continue to give your child his usual medicines, even if he is sick with the flu. **Do not give aspirin or aspirin-containing products to children with influenza.** Influenza and aspirin therapy may lead to Reye Syndrome, a rare condition that may lead to liver failure.

## PROTECT YOURSELF AND YOUR CHILD

### Flu shots

- A yearly flu vaccine (flu shot) is the first and most important step in protecting against seasonal flu. The seasonal flu vaccine protects against the three most common flu viruses. Also it can make the illness milder if you get another virus that is related to those in the vaccine.
- A seasonal vaccine will not protect you against the new H1N1 flu. This new H1N1 virus is very different from those viruses in the seasonal flu vaccine. A vaccine against this virus will soon be available. If you or your child is at risk for severe illness from this new H1N1 virus, there is more information about the vaccine online at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).

## **PROTECT YOURSELF AND YOUR CHILD, continued**

### **Practice everyday preventive actions. Teach your child to:**

- Cover nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing to keep from spreading flu viruses to others. Throw the tissue in the trash after using it.
- Wash hands often with soap and water, especially after coughing or sneezing. Alcohol gels are also good to clean hands.
- Avoid touching his eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Avoid close contact with sick people.
- Limit contact with crowds and avoid crowded places like shopping malls, restaurants and movie theaters. Just to be safe, stay at least six feet away from a person who sneezes or coughs.
- If your child is sick with flu-like illness, keep him home from school or childcare for at least 24 hours after the fever is gone. The fever (a temperature of 100.4°F or higher) should be gone without the use of a fever-reducing medicine like Tylenol®.

### **WHO SHOULD BE TESTED?**

Unless your child needs to be in the hospital, testing may not be necessary. Please do not bring your child to the Emergency Department for testing. Fevers and body aches are common at this time of year, and in a heavy flu season, the many sick patients needing care will be given priority over those who come to the hospital for testing.

### **ANTIVIRAL DRUGS**

These 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 do not cure the flu, but they can make the illness milder and make people feel better faster. They may also prevent serious flu complications. Most children get better on their own and don't need these medicines. At this time the supply of these anti-viral drugs is very low and many pharmacies do not have them. For these reasons, the antiviral drugs may be limited to patients who are in the hospital with severe illness.

### **WHEN TO CALL THE DOCTOR**

Most children with influenza do not need to see their doctor. Medicine to reduce fever (Tylenol® or ibuprofen), rest, and fluids will treat the symptoms. Call the doctor if your child:

- Has fever and is younger than 6 months
- Has a fever that lasts more than 3 days.
- Has flu symptoms and any of the conditions listed on page 1.
- Has a heart or lung condition and is having trouble breathing.
- Is much less active than usual.

For more information on the H1N1 influenza virus or flu vaccine, please visit [www.nationwidechildrens.org/H1N1](http://www.nationwidechildrens.org/H1N1)