



SOUTHWEST UTAH  
**PUBLIC HEALTH**  
D E P A R T M E N T  
PREVENT • PROMOTE • PROTECT

## **Pandemic Influenza Questions**

### **Answers from Paulette Valentine Director of Communicable Disease and Emergency Preparedness**

#### **What is Pandemic novel H1N1 (swine flu)?**

A new virus first detected in people in April 2009. This virus is spreading from person-to-person, in much the same way that regular seasonal influenza viruses spread.

#### **Is novel H1N1 virus contagious?**

Novel H1N1 virus is contagious and is spreading from human to human.

#### **What are the signs and symptoms of this virus in people?**

The symptoms 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 this virus also have reported diarrhea and vomiting. Also, like seasonal flu, severe illnesses and death has occurred as a result of illness associated with this virus.



#### **How severe is illness associated with novel H1N1 flu virus?**

It's not known at this time how severe novel H1N1 flu virus will be in the general population in the fall. Just recently it has just been updated to a category 2 in severity by the World Health Organization.

One thing that appears to be different from seasonal influenza is that adults older than **64** years do not yet appear to be at increased risk of novel H1N1-related complications. CDC is conducting laboratory studies to see if certain people might have natural immunity to this virus, depending on their age.

#### **How does novel H1N1 virus spread?**

Spread of novel H1N1 virus happens in the same way that seasonal flu spreads. Flu viruses are spread mainly from person to person through coughing or sneezing by people with influenza. Sometimes people may become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth, eyes or nose.

#### **How long can an infected person spread this virus to others?**

Studies have shown that 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. The CDC is studying the virus and its capabilities to try to learn more and will provide more information as it becomes available.

#### **Can I get infected with novel H1N1 virus from eating or preparing pork?**

No.

### **Is there a risk from drinking water?**

Tap water that has been treated by conventional disinfection processes does not pose a risk for transmission of influenza viruses.

### **What can I do to protect myself from getting sick?**

There is no vaccine available right now to protect against novel H1N1 virus. But will be available later in the fall or early winter. Take these everyday steps to protect your health:

- 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 properly and 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.
- Stay home if you are sick for 7 days after your symptoms begin or until you have been symptom-free for 24 hours, whichever is longer. This is to keep from infecting others and spreading the virus further.
- Eat right and exercise to maintain high levels of immunity.

### **Stay Informed:**

- Follow Southwest Utah Public Health Department advice regarding school closures, avoiding crowds and other social distancing measures. See [www.swuhealth.org](http://www.swuhealth.org)
- Be prepared in case you get sick and need to stay home for a week or so; a supply of food, water and over-the-counter medicines, alcohol-based hand rubs, tissues and other related items might could be useful and help avoid the need to make trips out in public while you are sick and contagious.

### **What is the best way to keep from spreading the virus through coughing or sneezing?**

If you are sick, limit your contact with other people as much as possible. If you are sick, stay home for 7 days after your symptoms begin or until you have been symptom-free for 24 hours, whichever is longer. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. Put your used tissue in the waste basket. Then, clean your hands, and do so every time you cough or sneeze.



### **If I have a family member at home who is sick with novel H1N1 flu, should I go to work?**

Employees who are well but who have an ill family member at home with novel H1N1 flu can go to work as usual. Monitor your health every day, and take everyday precautions including washing hands often with soap and water, especially after coughing or sneezing. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective. If you become ill, notify your supervisor and stay home. Employees who have an underlying medical condition or who are pregnant should call their health care provider for advice, because they might need to receive influenza antiviral drugs to prevent illness.

### **What is the best technique for washing my hands to avoid getting the flu?**

Washing your hands often will help protect you from germs. Wash with soap and water or clean with alcohol-based hand cleaner. CDC recommends that when you wash your hands -- with soap and warm water -- that you wash for 15 to 20 seconds. When soap and water are not available, alcohol-based disposable hand wipes or gel sanitizers may be used. You can find them in most supermarkets and drugstores. If using gel, rub your hands until the gel is dry. The gel doesn't need water to work; the alcohol in it kills the germs on your hands.

### **What should I do if I get sick?**

If you live in areas where people have been identified with novel H1N1 flu and become ill with influenza-like symptoms, including fever, body aches, runny or stuffy nose, sore throat, nausea, or vomiting or diarrhea, **you should stay home** and avoid contact with other people. Staying at home means that you should not leave your home except to seek medical care. This means avoiding normal activities, including work, school, travel, shopping, social events, and public gatherings.

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

If you become ill and experience any of the following warning signs, seek emergency medical care.

### **In children, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:**

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish or gray skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Not waking up or not interacting
- Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough

### **In adults, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:**

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough

### **Are there medicines to treat novel H1N1 infection?**

Yes. CDC recommends the use of antivirals for the treatment and/or prevention of infection with novel H1N1 flu virus. 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. If you get sick, antiviral drugs can make your illness milder and make you feel better faster. They may also prevent serious flu complications. During the current outbreak, the priority use for influenza antiviral drugs during is to treat severe influenza illness.

### **What kills influenza virus?**

Influenza virus is destroyed by heat (167-212°F [75-100°C]). In addition, several chemical germicides, including chlorine in a solution of 1 part bleach to 64 parts water (¼ cup bleach to 1 gallon water).



### **What is Southwest Utah Public Health Department doing in response to the outbreak?**

- Education to the public about how to avoid getting and spreading the virus.
- Informing the medical community of current guidance and protocols for novel H1N1 response
- Risk communication to provide accurate, consistent and comprehensive information.
- Updates on the situation of the virus and the disease tracking in our area.
- Preparation for the novel H1N1 vaccine points of distribution to the public
- Meeting with community partners and elected officials to review plans and update plans so we are as prepared as possible
- Being ready for the Strategic National Stockpile delivery of the pandemic supplies coming from the CDC.