

INFORMATION BULLETIN

INFLUENZA A (H1N1) SWINE FLU

(1) Signs and Symptoms

Signs and symptoms of the new influenza A (H1N1) virus are similar to the symptoms of seasonal flu and can include:

- fever
- cough
- sore throat
- runny or stuffy nose
- body aches
- chills
- fatigue

Some people also experience diarrhoea and vomiting.

Also like seasonal flu:

- the worst symptoms usually last about five days, but coughing can last up to two to three weeks
- some very young children, people with long-term medical conditions, pregnant women, and older people, can get very sick
- in rare instances severe illness and death can occur

The World Health Organisation says it will be difficult to tell the difference between seasonal flu and non seasonal influenza A (H1N1). Most people will experience a mild to moderate illness and will be able to manage the symptoms at home.

The key messages are:

- **If you have flu-like symptoms**, stay at home for seven days after your symptoms begin or until you have been symptom-free for 24 hours, whichever is longer.
- **If your condition worsens**, seek medical advice by phone first calling **Healthline 0800-611-116** or your healthcare provider.

(2) How does it spread?

The new influenza A (H1N1) virus spreads from person-to-person, in the same way that seasonal influenza spread.

The main form of transmission is through the coughs or sneezes of an infected person. Infected droplets are released into the air and breathed in by others. However, these droplets do not remain in the air for long and generally only affect people within two metres.

It is also possible to get influenza by touching contaminated surfaces, and then touching your nose, mouth or eyes.

The new influenza A (H1N1) virus is not spread through eating properly-cooked pork or handling pork products. Water chlorination also makes it very unlikely that people will get this virus from drinking water or swimming in chlorinated pools.

(3) How infectious is it?

Because the virus is new, people have no immunity to it so it will spread more quickly and widely than the seasonal flu. The pandemic situation could mean lots of people become sick at the same time and this could have a big impact on our day-to-day lives, and place considerable pressure on the health services.

Expert's are not yet sure how long people who have Influenza A (H1N1) virus are infectious and able to pass on the virus to others. It appears they could be infectious from a day before they experience symptoms until about seven days after they first experience them.

Children especially younger children, may be infectious for longer periods. However early use of antiviral medicines, such as Tamiflu, can reduce this infectious period.

(4) Be prepared!

Many people will be sick during a flu pandemic, and it may be difficult to get medical or nursing care. You must be prepared to take care of yourself and others at home.

So you don't need to make trips out in public while you are sick, have at least a week's supply of:

- alcohol-based hand rubs
- paracetamol
- tissues
- food
- medical supplies.

Make sure you have contact details for friends/family/neighbours easily available so that you can call them if you need help.

Think about:

- who will look after your extended family if they become sick
- organising child care if school and day care facilities close
- whether or not you can work from home
- who could deliver groceries or meals to sick family members if they need them.

(5) Protecting yourself and others

Personal hygiene is really important in reducing your chances of getting the new influenza A (H1N1) virus, or passing it on to others:

Wash and dry your hands frequently

Wash your hands for at least 20 seconds and dry them for 20 seconds, or use an alcohol-based hand rub.

Wash your hands before [preparing food and eating or smoking; after coughing, sneezing, wiping children's noses, visiting the toilet or changing nappies.

Cover your coughs and sneezes

Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze and put your used tissue in a bin (if you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve – not your hands).

Remember to wash your hands afterwards.

Avoid touching your nose, mouth or eyes. Germs spread that way.

Stay away from other people if you or they are sick

If you become unwell, stay away from other people.

Try and stay a metre away from sick people to reduce the spread of germs.

Reduce the time spent in crowded settings.

Contamination and cleaning

Regularly clean flat surfaces such as bathroom sinks, bedside cabinets, desks and table tops where germs can live for up to 48 hours. Wipe down with a household disinfectant.

If you've got flu symptoms

Stay at home for seven days after your symptoms begin or until you have been symptom-free for 24 hours, whichever is longer.

If your condition worsens

Seek medical advice by phoning Healthline 0800-611-116 or your healthcare provider first to avoid potentially infecting others.

For more information check out the Ministry of Health website: www.moh.govt.nz