



H1N1 Flu Virus (Human Swine Flu)

This fact sheet provides basic information only. It must not take the place of medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Always talk to a health care professional about any health concerns you have, and before you make any changes to your diet, lifestyle or treatment.

What is H1N1 flu virus (Human Swine Flu)?

The H1N1 flu virus is a respiratory disease caused by type A influenza viruses. These viruses have been reported to spread from person to person, but in the past, this transmission was limited.

What are the signs and symptoms of H1N1 flu virus in people?

The symptoms of H1N1 flu virus in people are similar to the symptoms of regular human flu and include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills, and fatigue. Some people have reported diarrhea and vomiting associated with swine flu. In the past, severe illness (pneumonia and respiratory failure) and deaths have been reported with H1N1 flu virus infection in people. Like seasonal flu, swine flu may cause a worsening of underlying chronic medical conditions.

How does H1N1 flu virus spread?

Spread of the H1N1 flu virus is thought to be happening in the same way that seasonal flu spreads. Flu viruses are spread mainly from person to person through coughing or sneezing. Sometimes people may become infected by touching contaminated objects or surfaces and then touching their mouth or nose.

How long can someone with the flu infect someone else?

Infected people may be able to infect others beginning one day before symptoms develop and up to seven or more days after becoming sick. That means that you may be able to pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick. Children, especially younger ones, might potentially be contagious for longer periods. This means that individuals who think they may have symptoms should wash their hands, cough/sneeze into their sleeve and contact their doctor or Telehealth at 1-866-797-0000.

Should Ontarians wear surgical masks to avoid catching H1N1 flu virus?

Ontarians should continue to take normal precautions to protect themselves as they would from a regular flu. Members of the general public do not need to wear surgical masks to protect themselves against catching H1N1 flu virus. Evidence shows that this is not effective in preventing transmission of influenza in the general public. People often use masks incorrectly, or contaminate the mask when putting them on and taking them off, which could actually increase the risk of infection.

What can I do to protect myself from getting sick?

There is no vaccine available right now to protect against H1N1 flu virus. There are everyday actions that can help prevent the spread of germs that cause respiratory illnesses like influenza. Take these everyday steps to protect your health:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. A 60% to 90% alcohol-based hand rub is also effective.
- Sneeze and cough into your sleeve.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.
- If you get sick with the flu, stay home from work or school and limit contact with others.

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. Do not go to work or school if ill. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. It may prevent those around you from getting sick. Put your used tissue in the waste basket. Cough or sneeze into your sleeve if you do not have a tissue. Then, clean your hands, and do so every time you cough or sneeze.

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 warm water for 15 to 20 seconds or clean your hands with alcohol-based hand rub.

What should I do if I get sick?

If you become ill with flu-like symptoms, including fever, body aches, runny nose, sore throat, nausea, vomiting or diarrhea, contact your health care provider or call TeleHealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000.

Can I get H1N1 flu virus from eating or preparing pork?

No. Proper cooking of pork products kills viruses. Make sure pork is cooked through, not pink in the middle. Use a food thermometer to confirm pork has been heated through to 71 degrees Celsius (160 degrees Fahrenheit).

*Adapted from: Ministry of Health,
Public Health Division*

