

H1N1 Questions and Answers

Q: What is the difference between seasonal flu and the swine flu (H1N1)?

A: The 2009 H1N1 influenza is a respiratory illness caused by a brand new Type A influenza virus formed from swine flu, avian flu and human flu viruses. Seasonal flu is also a respiratory illness caused by a virus. Seasonal flu can be Type A or Type B. THE SYMPTOMS FOR BOTH SEASONAL FLU AND H1N1 ARE THE SAME. There is a wide spectrum of severity for both types. People born after 1957 are more susceptible to H1N1 than those born before. CDC studies of the virus in the Southern Hemisphere show it has not become more virulent, though some studies show it may spread more rapidly than seasonal flu.

Q: What are the symptoms?

A: Symptoms for both include a fever of 100F or more, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills, tiredness and runny or stuffy nose. 25% of cases will have diarrhea and vomiting.

Q: What is the most important thing I can do to protect myself?

A: The single most important protection for avoidance of both seasonal flu and H1N1 flu is vaccination. The next most important protection is to maintain 2-3 feet distance from those around you if possible. People can be contagious before they show symptom for up to 48 hours and can still be shedding virus for 24 hours after they are fever free. The next most important is frequent hand washing for at least 30 seconds at a time.

Q: Can I catch H1N1 through contact with "infected" objects or surfaces?

A: Yes, you can. Although not nearly as common as direct person to person contact, H1N1 survives longer outside the body in cold and dry weather. It survives up to 24 to 48 hours on hard surfaces, such as stainless steel and plastic, but less than 8 to 12 hours on cloth, paper and tissue. Therefore, by sneezing into your elbow or shoulder, it is less likely to be spread as by sneezing onto a hard surface such as a desktop. It is readily killed with common cleaners.

Q: Why am I seeing the term "ILI" so frequently in the news? What does it mean?

A: ILI refers to Influenza-like illness. It is impossible to count all cases of influenza and to genetically determine what type they are. The symptoms and the treatments are too similar. Organizations like the CDC and the Lake County Health Department use "ILI" to approximate the true disease burden to the medical system.

Q: Do I need to get both vaccines?

A: H1N1 vaccine will not protect you from seasonal flu. Therefore, it is recommended you get both vaccines. At this time, it is expected the two vaccines can be given on the same day.

Q: What puts a person at more risk to die from influenza?

A: Two thirds of people who die from influenza have underlying medical conditions such as asthma, heart disease, various pulmonary conditions, compromised immune systems, hepatic and metabolic disorders.