

# Novel Influenza A (H1N1) Fact Sheet

## Schools



### What is novel influenza A H1N1 (novel flu)?

The novel flu virus, that is currently circulating in the U.S. and other parts of the world, is a unique combination of swine and human flu viruses. This virus is transmitted from person to person, not from pigs to humans. None of the current cases had exposure to swine.

### What are the symptoms of novel flu?

The symptoms of novel flu are similar to the symptoms of regular seasonal flu and include **fever, cough, sore throat, rhinorrhea (runny nose), nasal congestion, body aches, headache, chills** and **fatigue**. Some people have reported diarrhea and vomiting along with respiratory symptoms. Like seasonal flu, novel flu may be more severe in those who have chronic medical conditions.



### How does novel flu spread?

The current novel influenza virus spreads the same way as seasonal flu. Flu viruses are spread by an ill person coughing or sneezing. Sometimes people can become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it (such as a door knob) and then touching their mouth or nose.

#### How can I protect myself and my loved ones against novel flu?

- Avoid contact with ill persons.
- When you cough or sneeze, cover your nose and mouth with a tissue or into your elbow (if you do not have a tissue). Throw used tissues in a trash can.
- After you cough or sneeze, wash your hands with soap and water, or use an alcohol-based hand gel.
- If you are ill, stay away from other people by staying home. Do not go to work, school, or travel while ill.
- If you have visited areas where novel flu cases have been confirmed and develop flu like symptoms within seven days after your return, it is important to contact your health care provider and be tested. Remind them to contact local public health officials. Visit [www.cdc.gov/swineflu](http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu) for current list of areas with novel flu.

### How long can an infected person spread novel flu to others?

People with novel flu are potentially contagious as long as they have symptoms and possibly for up to 7 days after they become ill. Children, especially younger children, might be contagious for longer than 7 days.

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### What should be done to prevent or reduce the spread of influenza in schools?

- ✓ **Stay home when ill.** Any employee, student, teacher, or staff suspected of having influenza should not attend school.
- ✓ **Wash hands often.** Wash hands several times a day using soap and warm water for 15-20 seconds (this is generally around the time it takes to sing the ABC's). Dry hands with paper towels or automatic hand dryers if possible. In school, allow regular breaks for the students and teachers to wash hands. Young children should be instructed and assisted to ensure proper hand hygiene. Restrooms should be checked regularly to ensure that soap and paper towels are always available.
- ✓ **Throw away tissues.** Influenza can be spread from coughs or sneezes. Make sure tissues are available in all classrooms. Students and staff should cover their mouths with their upper arm or a tissue when coughing and use a tissue when sneezing or blowing their noses. Tissues should be thrown away immediately followed by proper hand hygiene.
- ✓ **Use alcohol-based hand sanitizer.** Alcohol-based hand gels may be used in classrooms to minimize disruption. Hand sanitizer is effective in killing germs on hands when they are not visibly soiled. Appropriate times to use hand sanitizer are after coughing, sneezing, or contact with infected surfaces (e.g., desk, doorknob).
- ✓ **Avoid close contact.** Schools should be extra-vigilant that ill students be excluded from sports activities, choir or any activities that may involve close contact, since transmission of influenza may be easier in these situations. All students and staff should avoid sharing of saliva, i.e., sharing glasses, water bottles, other drinks, spoons/forks, or kissing, etc.
- ✓ **Don't forget about the school bus.** School buses, because of the enclosed space, may allow for easy spread of influenza. Tissues should be available on the buses, and students should be encouraged to cover nose and mouth while coughing or sneezing. Disinfect commonly handled interior surfaces (i.e., door handles, hand rails, etc.) between groups of students, if possible. Consider making alcohol-based hand gel available on buses since hand washing facilities are not available.
- ✓ **Clean surfaces frequently.** In the school, clean commonly used surfaces such as door handles, handrails, eating surfaces, desks, etc., frequently with disinfectant (bleach solutions or commercial disinfectants are appropriate).

### How long can viruses live outside the body on a surface like a doorknob?

Some viruses and bacteria can live 2 hours or longer on surfaces like cafeteria tables, doorknobs, and desks. Frequent hand washing or using an alcohol based hand gel will help you reduce the chances of becoming ill after touching these surfaces.

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### **Is there a vaccine for novel flu?**

Currently there is no vaccine to protect humans from novel flu.

### **Are there medicines I can take if I get sick with novel flu?**

Yes. If you get sick, antiviral drugs can make your illness milder and make you feel better faster. They may also prevent serious flu complications. They are usually used only for those at high risk of becoming seriously ill. For treatment, antiviral drugs work best if started soon after getting sick (within 2 days of when your symptoms start).

### **Can I get some antiviral drugs to keep at home, just in case I get sick?**

No. You should not ask your healthcare provider for antiviral medication to keep at home “just in case”. If many people did this, it would mean less antivirals available for those who do get sick.

### **Can I get novel influenza from eating or preparing pork?**

No. This novel flu virus is not spread by food. You cannot get this novel influenza from eating pork or pork products. Eating properly handled and cooked pork products is safe.