

H1N1 (Swine Flu)

By John Bradley, MD

What is H1N1?

H1N1 is a new influenza virus that emerged in April 2009. Every several years, influenza mutates into a new strain of virus that has an outer covering that is slightly different from all previous influenza viruses. Since the outer covering is what is recognized by human immune systems, and this new virus is one that is unlike any that has circulated in over 50 years, everyone under 65 years old is susceptible to infection if they come in contact with the new H1N1 virus. Since virtually everyone on planet Earth is susceptible, this virus has spread across the globe, causing a "pandemic." Regular influenza viruses cause serious infection, with 36,000 people dying in the United States each year from influenza-related complications. The new H1N1 virus causes the same degree of illness as the regular flu: it is no worse, and no better than strains of influenza we are exposed to each year. This flu, as in the others, is spread from person to person generally through respiratory droplets from coughing and sneezing. It can also be spread by contacting an object that a person with the flu virus has previously contacted.

How do I protect my children from contracting H1N1?

Parents should encourage frequent hand-washing and avoid crowds that are likely to contain people close by who are coughing and sneezing. Avoid direct contact with people who are sick. Parents do not need to take their healthy children out of school or daycare for fear of them coming down with influenza unless it is recommended by the public health authorities.

Signs and Symptoms of H1N1:

Some of the signs and symptoms of the H1N1 flu include:

- fever
- cough
- sore throat
- runny or stuffy nose
- body aches
- headache, chills
- fatigue
- sometimes diarrhea and vomiting.

If a child should develop flu-like symptoms, parents should keep them at home, avoiding contact with others until they are without fever for a minimum of 24 hours before returning to school or daycare.

Treatment of H1N1:

There are no rapid tests that can accurately diagnose the H1N1 swine flu. Some of the rapid tests that are used for the regular flu do not work very well for the swine flu. At this time specific lab testing for the H1N1 flu, performed at the San Diego Public Health Laboratory, is only being used in hospitalized patients. H1N1 can be treated with anti-viral medications such as Tamiflu, which do shorten the course of the flu, especially if treatment is started early. Any child with significant disease is being treated. However, some children will have mild illness, will recover relatively quickly, and do not require treatment. Pediatricians will determine what the best course of treatment is for your child. Parents should encourage their children to drink plenty of fluids and rest while they have the H1N1 flu.

Are there vaccines available?

Yes an H1N1 vaccine has been developed and will arrive in pediatrician's offices by November 2009. Check with your child's pediatrician to get the most updated specifics of the vaccine. This year, the regular flu vaccine is also recommended for ALL children, too, so there will be two separate immunizations this year for influenza. The regular flu vaccine (also called seasonal flu vaccine) does not protect against H1N1 pandemic swine flu.

Are the vaccines safe?

The H1N1 vaccine is made exactly like the regular seasonal flu vaccine. This is NOT an experimental vaccine, despite what you may have heard. The H1N1 vaccine is just as safe and effective as the regular flu vaccines. For the H1N1 flu shot, about half of those who get the vaccine may have a sore arm, but NOBODY will come down with the flu as a result of the flu shot. We do NOT expect to have any complications of the type that were seen in 1976 with a much different vaccine for a different kind of swine flu. This vaccine is as safe as the regular flu vaccine. Like all vaccines given to children, the H1N1 vaccine was put through laboratory and clinical tests before being released. Vaccines are one of the most thoroughly tested and safest medical products that are on the market, since they are generally given to otherwise healthy people. Anyone can report any symptom they feel may be from a particular vaccine to a central system called Vaccine Adverse Events Reporting System (VAERS).

Additional H1N1 Information Resources:

[Click here to watch a video of Dr. Bradley on SanDiego6 covering H1N1 and the pediatric community](#)

http://www.cpmgsandiego.com/video_bradley_h1n1.html

http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/?s_cid=w_c_H1N1Messages_Info_cont_001

<http://www.flu.gov/individualfamily/about/h1n1/index.html>

<http://www.aap.org/advocacy/releases/swineflu.htm>

<http://www.cdc.gov/vaccinesafety/basic/safety.htm>