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H1N1 (Swine Flu): Information for Parents and Caregivers

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The following information comes from the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

What is H1N1?

H1N1 or swine flu is an illness caused by a new form of the flu virus. The virus is spreading from person-to-person just like the regular flu.

How does H1N1 spread?

People with the flu can give you the virus if they cough or sneeze near you. You can also become sick by touching something with germs on it, such as door knobs, and then touching your eyes, mouth or nose. Unless they need urgent medical help, keep children who are sick at home. Don't send them to school or daycare.

Are children more likely to get sick?

Children under 5 years old are more likely to get sicker from H1N1 than older children. Although rare, pneumonia and even death has been reported in children who get H1N1. The flu tends to be more serious in children with chronic medical problems like asthma or diabetes.

What are the symptoms?

Fever and one or more of the following:

- Cough
- Sore throat
- Body aches
- Headache
- Chills and fatigue
- Sometimes vomiting and diarrhea

Young children may not have typical symptoms. They may also have difficulty breathing and not be as active as they normally are.

What should I do to control my child's fever?

For younger children, place a cold cloth on her/his forehead. Do not give your children aspirin or aspirin-containing products (like Pepto Bismol) if you think she/he has H1N1. Aspirin can cause a rare illness in children called Reye Syndrome. Talk to your doctor before giving children younger than 4 years of age over-the-counter cold medicine.

How long is a person with the flu able to give the flu to others?

This is still unknown. You may be able to spread flu germs for up to 1 day before and up to 7 days after you start having symptoms.

Is there a vaccine for H1N1?

A vaccine to prevent H1N1 is still being tested. The best way to prevent the spread of H1N1 is by staying away from sick people, washing your hands often, and covering your cough.

What steps can I take to keep my family healthy?

The flu spreads from person to person mainly through the coughing or sneezing of a sick person. You can also become sick by touching something with germs on it, such as door knobs, and then touching your eyes, mouth or nose.

Avoid close contact with people who are sick. If you are sick, keep your distance from others to protect them from getting sick.

- Get your seasonal flu shot or flu mist early this fall. Get it for FREE at the annual Health Department drive-thru flu clinic on Sunday, October 4th from 10 AM - 2 PM. Go to Columbia Gateway Drive in Columbia and enter from Rt. 175.
- If possible, stay home from work, school, and errands when you are sick. You will help prevent others from getting sick. People with the flu should stay away from others until at least 24 hours after their fever is gone. The fever should be gone without the use of a fever-lowering medicine.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or inside of your elbow when you cough or sneeze. Make sure to put used tissues in the trash after one use.
- Wash your hands often with warm water and soap. Alcohol-based hand cleaners like Purell also work.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Get plenty of sleep, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids, and eat nutritious food.

[Tips for Staying Healthy \(in English\)](#)

[Tips for Staying Healthy \(in Korean\)](#)

[Tips for Staying Healthy \(in Spanish\)](#)

What is the best way to wash my hands to avoid getting H1N1 or seasonal flu?

- Washing your hands often helps protect you from germs.
- Use soap and warm water when you wash your hands. Wash for 15 to 20 seconds. Have your child sing two verses of “Happy Birthday” to allow for enough time.
- When soap and water are not available, alcohol-based hand wipes or gel may be used. You can find them in many supermarkets and drugstores. If using gel, rub your hands until the gel is dry. The gel does not need water to work; the alcohol in it kills the germs on your hands.

If my child has H1N1 symptoms, when should I call the doctor?

Anyone can get the flu. Call your doctor right away if you or a family member in the following groups have signs of H1N1.

- Children less than 5 years old;
- Persons aged 65 years or older;
- Children and teens (less than 18 years) who are on long-term aspirin therapy;
- Pregnant women;
- Adults and children who have chronic diseases;
- Adults and children who have HIV or immune system problems;
- Residents of nursing homes and other chronic-care places.

What if my child does not have a regular doctor?

If your child meets the symptom checklist listed above and you do not have a regular doctor, call one of our local urgent care centers.

A list of urgent care centers located in Howard County is available at http://www.howardcountymd.gov/Health/docs/Urgent_care_centers.pdf

When should I take my child to the emergency room or call an ambulance?

A sick child may need medical help right away if he or she:

- Is breathing fast, has trouble breathing, or has chest pain.
- Has bluish skin or lip color (for fair tones) and grayish skin or lip color (for darker tones).
- Is not drinking enough fluids.
- Is vomiting and unable to keep liquids down.
- Is not waking up or not interacting normally.
- Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held.
- Has flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough.
- Has a fever with a rash.
- Has dizziness when standing or in infants, a lack of tears when they cry.
- Is unable to urinate for a long period of time.
- Has seizures.
- Is less responsive than normal or becomes confused.

What should I do to take care of my sick child at home?

Check out our “H1N1 (Swine Flu): Tips for Taking Care of a Sick Person at Home”
[Click here to get information about caring for a sick person in your home.](#)

When can my child go back to school or day care?

Children with flu-like symptoms should stay home from school or day care. Keep sick children away from others until at least 24 hours after their fever is gone. The fever should be gone without the use of a fever-lowering medicine. Even if your child is on antiviral medicine, they should stay home until they are fever-free and feeling better. Check with your doctor if you have questions about when your child should return to school or day care.

Where can I go for more information?

Howard County Health Department – www.hchealth.org

The Health Department will update our website regularly about H1N1.

For more information, we recommend that you go to the following websites:

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

<http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/>

The State of Maryland

<http://www.dhmh.md.gov/swineflu/index.html>