

# Novel H1N1 Flu (Swine Flu)

As of 9/4/09

## **What is Novel H1N1 Flu (Swine Flu)?**

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Novel H1N1 Flu (referred to as “Swine Flu” early on) is a new influenza virus causing illness in people. This new virus was first detected in people in the United States in April 2009. This virus is spreading from person-to-person worldwide, probably in much the same way that regular seasonal influenza viruses spread.

## **Will CIGNA offer the Novel H1N1 Flu (Swine Flu) vaccine when it becomes available?**

CIGNA will cover the Novel H1N1 vaccine under the preventive care benefit for all customers. H1N1 Flu shots will be covered at 100% with no copay or coinsurance. The benefit will be paid in excess of the plan maximums, will not be subject to any co-pay, and will not be applied to wellness or outpatient plan benefits. CIGNA Voluntary will cover the allowable costs for the administration of the H1N1 vaccine, even if the member's benefits have been exhausted. You should still plan to get your seasonal flu shot as the H1N1 vaccine is **not** intended to replace the seasonal flu vaccine – it is intended to be administered in addition to the seasonal flu vaccine.

## **If there is a Novel H1N1 Flu (Swine Flu) vaccine, can I get it?**

On July 29, the CDC Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices provided recommendations as to who should receive the H1N1 Flu (Swine Flu) influenza vaccine:

- Pregnant women because they are at higher risk of complications and can potentially provide protection to infants who cannot be vaccinated;
- Household contacts and caregivers for children younger than 6 months of age because younger infants are at higher risk of influenza-related complications and cannot be vaccinated. Vaccination of those in close contact with infants less than 6 months old might help protect infants by “cocooning” them from the virus;
- Health care and emergency medical services personnel because infections among health care workers have been reported and this can be a potential source of infection for vulnerable patients. Also, increased absenteeism in this population could reduce healthcare system capacity;
- All people from 6 months through 24 years of age;
- Children from 6 months through 18 years of age because there have been many cases of Novel H1N1 influenza in children and they are in close contact with one another in school and day care settings, which increases the likelihood of disease spread, and
- Young adults 19 through 24 years of age because there have been many cases of Novel H1N1 influenza in these healthy young adults, they often live, work, and study in close proximity, and they are a frequently mobile population; and
- Persons aged 25 through 64 years who have health conditions associated with a higher risk of medical complications from influenza.
- If you are interested in getting the Novel H1N1 Flu (Swine Flu) vaccine, you should contact your primary care doctor.

## **Can everyone get the Novel H1N1 Flu (Swine Flu) vaccine?**

The Novel H1N1 Flu (Swine Flu) vaccine is still in production and, as it stands now, will **not** be readily available to all populations (subject to change). As a result of this anticipated low volume, the CDC recommends that the target populations stated above receive the vaccination before others.

Distribution of the Novel H1N1 Flu (Swine Flu) vaccine will be handled at the state level, and vaccine information and guidelines are changing daily, so please be on the lookout for additional updates and communications.



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**If I am part of the priority population and get the Novel H1N1 Flu (Swine Flu) vaccine from my primary care doctor, will CIGNA cover the cost?**

Yes, CIGNA will cover the cost of the administration of the Novel H1N1 Flu vaccine if you or your dependents are covered by a CIGNA Medical Plan.

**Is Novel H1N1 Flu (Swine Flu) contagious?**

The CDC has determined that the current strain of influenza A (H1N1) virus is contagious and is spreading from human to human. Currently, Novel H1N1 Flu remains suspect in many episodes of flu-like illness throughout the world.

**What are the signs and symptoms of Novel H1N1 Flu (Swine Flu)?**

The symptoms of Novel H1N1 Flu 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. Like seasonal flu, Novel H1N1 Flu (Swine Flu) may cause a worsening of underlying chronic medical conditions. Severe illness (pneumonia and respiratory failure) and deaths have been reported in patients with asthma, diabetes, significant obesity, and chronic illness that affect immune system with flu infection.

**How does the Novel H1N1 Flu (Swine Flu) spread?**

Spread of the swine 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 of people with influenza. Sometimes people may become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose.

**What should I do if I get sick?**

If you become ill with influenza-like symptoms, including fever, body aches, runny nose, sore throat, nausea, or vomiting or diarrhea, you should contact a health care professional immediately, particularly if you are worried about your symptoms. Health care professionals can determine whether influenza testing or treatment is needed.

Those who are sick should stay home and avoid contact with other people as much as possible to keep from spreading the illness to others. If you become ill and experience any of the following warning signs, seek emergency medical care.

In adults, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting

In children, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Not waking up or not interacting
- Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough
- Fever with a rash

**Are there medicines to treat Novel H1N1 Flu (Swine Flu)?**

Yes. Antiviral drugs are prescription medicines that fight against the flu by keeping flu viruses from reproducing in the body. Antiviral drugs can make the illness milder and make an individual feel



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better faster. They may also prevent serious flu complications. For treatment, antiviral drugs work best if started soon after getting sick (within two days of symptoms).

#### **When 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 individuals may be able to pass on the flu before they know they are sick, as well as while they are sick. Children, especially younger children, might potentially be contagious for longer periods.

#### **Can I get Novel H1N1 Flu (Swine Flu) from eating or preparing pork?**

No. H1N1 influenza viruses are not spread by food. You cannot get swine influenza from eating pork or pork products. Eating properly handled and cooked pork products is safe.

#### **I came in contact with someone who has been confirmed to have Novel H1N1 Flu (Swine Flu) – what should I do? Should I stay away from work?**

If your contact was passing and greater than 6 feet – perhaps someone you know, socialize or work with - you should minimize the spread of germs by taking the following actions:

- Cover nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. Throw the tissue in the trash after use.
- Wash hands often with soap and water, especially after coughing or sneezing. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
- Avoid touching eyes, nose, or mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Stay hydrated. This is the best way to avoid a compromised immune system.
- Avoid close contact with sick people.
- You do not need to stay away from work if you are healthy.
- Be sure to consult your doctor if you exhibit any of the following symptoms:
  - Fever (greater than 100o F or 37.8o C)
  - Sore throat
  - Cough
  - Stuffy nose
  - Chills
  - Headache and body aches
  - Fatigue
  - Vomiting and Diarrhea

If you are confirmed to have Novel H1N1 Flu (Swine Flu), you should limit contact with others to keep from infecting them. Contact your manager concerning your company's policy on staying home or working from home. If you are the caregiver for someone in your household who has been confirmed to have Novel H1N1 Flu (Swine Flu), take the following steps:

- Wear a surgical mask when in close contact with others. Drug stores or hardware stores stock them.
- Sanitize all exposed surfaces with appropriate biocidal cleaners frequently.
- When you cough or sneeze, cover your nose and mouth with a tissue or your sleeve (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 and or use an alcohol-based hand gel.
- You should contact your doctor for advice about additional precautions if you are at high risk for complications.
- Stay home. Stay in one room and avoid close contact with others as much as possible.

#### **Should I be taking antiviral drugs?**

Antiviral drugs are only recommended in specific cases including confirmed cases and for close family contacts who are at high risk for complications, children in day care who are at high risk, and health care professionals. For all other asymptomatic populations, including those in the work place, public health officials are not recommending they take antivirals even if they are exposed to a confirmed case.

#### **How long can viruses live outside the body?**

We know that some viruses and bacteria can live two hours or longer on surfaces such as



cafeteria tables, doorknobs, and desks. Frequent hand-washing will help you reduce the chance of becoming contaminated from these common surfaces



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## Prevention

### **What can I do to protect myself from getting sick?**

There are everyday actions that can help prevent the spread of germs that cause respiratory illnesses like influenza. Cover nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. Throw the tissue in the trash after use.

- Wash hands often with soap and water, especially after coughing or sneezing. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also very effective, but should not replace washing your hands (if soap and water is available).
- Avoid touching eyes, nose, or mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Stay hydrated. This is the best way to avoid a compromised immune system.
- Avoid close contact with sick people.
- The CDC recommends that individuals who are sick from influenza should stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.

### **What is the best way to keep from spreading the virus through coughing or sneezing?**

Limit contact with other people as much as possible. Do not go to work or school if ill and report your symptoms to your doctor. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. Discard used tissues in the waste basket. Cover coughs or sneezes with your hand if you don't have a tissue, but then be sure to wash your hands after each cough or sneeze.

### **What is the best technique for washing my hands to avoid getting the flu?**

Washing hands often will help protect against germs. Wash with soap and water and/or clean with alcohol-based hand cleaner – even if there is no visible debris or gross contamination on hands. The CDC recommends that hands be washed with soap and warm water for AT LEAST 15 to 20 seconds. When soap and water are not available, alcohol-based disposable hand wipes or gel sanitizers may be used.

### **Can I use an alcohol-based hand cleaner (hand sanitizer) instead of washing my hands?**

According to the Mayo Clinic, alcohol-based hand sanitizers – which don't require water – are an excellent alternative to hand washing, particularly when soap and water aren't available. Commercially prepared hand sanitizers contain ingredients that help prevent skin dryness. Using these products can result in less skin dryness and irritation than hand washing.

It's important to note, however, that not all hand sanitizers are created equal. And, the CDC recommends choosing products that contain at least 60 percent alcohol.

To use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer:

- Apply about 1/2 teaspoon of the product to the palm of your hand.
- Rub your hands together, covering all surfaces of your hands, until they're dry.

If your hands are visibly dirty, however, wash with soap and water, if available, rather than a sanitizer.

## Resources for Seasonal Flu

### **Where can I get more information on the seasonal flu and the Novel H1N1 Flu (Swine Flu)?**

Further information is available at:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (<http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/>)
- World Health Organization (WHO) (<http://www.who.int/csr/disease/swineflu/en/index.html>)
- US Government Pandemic Preparedness ([www.pandemicflu.gov](http://www.pandemicflu.gov))
- International SOS Preparedness Protocols (ISOS) (<http://www.internationalsos.com/pandemicpreparedness/>)

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