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H1N1 Flu Virus

What is H1N1 flu virus?

The H1N1 flu virus is a respiratory disease caused by type A influenza viruses. These viruses spread from person-to-person, and cause seasonal flu-like symptoms.

What are the signs and symptoms of H1N1 flu virus in people?

The symptoms of H1N1 flu virus in people are similar to the symptoms of regular seasonal flu and include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people have reported diarrhea and vomiting associated with swine flu. In the past, severe illness (pneumonia and respiratory failure) and deaths have been reported with H1N1 flu virus infection in people. Like seasonal flu, swine flu may cause a worsening of underlying chronic medical conditions.

How does H1N1 flu virus spread?

Spread of the H1N1 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. Sometimes people may become infected by touching contaminated objects or surfaces with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose.

How long 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 you may be able to pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick. Children, especially younger children, might potentially be contagious for longer periods. This means that people who think they may have symptoms should wash their hands, cover coughs and sneezes, stay at home if they are sick and contact their doctor or Telehealth at 1-866-797-0000.

Should Ontarians wear surgical masks to avoid catching H1N1 flu virus?

Ontarians should continue normal activities like going to work and community events or worship services and take normal precautions to protect themselves as they would from a regular flu. Members of the general public do not need to wear surgical masks to protect themselves against catching H1N1 flu virus. Evidence shows that this is not effective in preventing transmission of influenza in the general public. People often use masks incorrectly, or contaminate the mask when putting them on and taking them off, which could actually increase the risk of infection.

What can I do to protect myself from getting sick?

A vaccine for the H1N1 virus is currently in production. In the meantime, there are everyday actions that can help prevent the spread of germs that cause respiratory illnesses like influenza. Take these everyday steps to protect your health:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. 60% -90% alcohol-based hand rub is also effective.
- Sneeze and cough in your sleeve.
- If you get sick with the flu, stay home from work or school and limit contact with others.

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

If you are sick, limit your contact with other people as much as possible. Do not go to work or school if ill. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. It may prevent those around you from getting sick. Put your used tissue in the waste basket. Cover your cough or sneeze in your sleeve if you do not have a tissue. Then, wash your hands, and do so every time you cough or sneeze.

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

Washing your hands often will help protect you from germs. Wash with soap and warm water for 15 to 20 seconds or clean your hands with alcohol-based hand rub.

[Handwashing Techniques](#) [PDF]

What should I do if I get sick?

If you become ill with flu-like symptoms, including fever, body aches, runny nose, sore throat, nausea, or vomiting or diarrhea, contact your health care provider or call TeleHealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000.

Can I get H1N1 flu virus from eating or preparing pork?

No. Proper cooking of pork products would kill any viruses. Make sure pork is cooked through, not pink in the middle. Use a food thermometer to confirm pork has been heated through to 71 degrees Celsius (160 degrees Fahrenheit).

For More Information

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Tips to stay healthy

Flu shots – seasonal and H1N1

This year, two vaccines have been developed – one against seasonal flu and the other against H1N1 flu. Remember, you might need them both. The seasonal flu shot will not protect you against the H1N1 flu. This year's seasonal flu shot will be available as usual in the fall, while the H1N1 vaccine will be available later in the year. The H1N1 vaccine will first be offered to target groups such as health care workers, pregnant women and people with pre-existing medical conditions. Everyone who needs and wants the H1N1 flu shot, as well as the seasonal flu shot, will be able to get one. Consult your health care provider or public health unit about this year's flu immunization programs.

Cleaning your hands is the best defence against the flu

We've all heard this before, but it can never be said too often: proper hand cleaning is an important way to guard against the flu and limit the spread of the flu virus. Flu viruses can live on your hands for up to five minutes and they can live on hard surfaces that you touch with your hands – like countertops and telephones – for up to two days. So clean your hands often to protect yourself and others from getting the flu.

Cleaning your hands

Hand washing

Soap and water work well, but be sure to use lots of soap and water. Wash your hands thoroughly for about 15 seconds. Try humming a favourite tune and keep washing until the song is over to make sure you wash your hands long enough.

Alcohol-based hand sanitizer

Alcohol-based hand sanitizers are as good as soap and water to clean your hands, unless they are visibly dirty. Make sure you really rub the sanitizer all over your hands, and be sure to use a sanitizer that contains 60 – 90% alcohol base. Keep alcohol-based hand sanitizer handy at home, at work, at school, and in the car.

Preventing the spread of the flu



Good hand hygiene is the best way to prevent the spread of all flu viruses. Wash your hands with soap and water thoroughly and often.



Keep an alcohol-based sanitizer (gel or wipes) handy at work, home and in your car. It needs to be at least 60% alcohol to be effective.

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What to do if you have symptoms

Symptoms

Both seasonal and H1N1 flu have the same symptoms. Those can include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue.

When you should seek medical care

Most cases of the flu, whether seasonal or H1N1, tend to be mild. However, if you do not start to feel better after a few days or if your symptoms get worse, you should either contact your doctor or call **Telehealth Ontario** at 1-866-797-0000.

You should seek medical care immediately if you experience flu symptoms and you :

- are pregnant;
- have heart or lung disease;
- have any other chronic health problem that requires regular medical attention;
- are elderly or frail; or
- have an illness or are receiving treatments – for example, for diabetes, cancer, or HIV/AIDS – that might affect your immune system.

If your child is suffering from the flu, you should seek medical care immediately if his or her symptoms improve and then suddenly become worse. In addition, seek care if you notice any of the following signs in your child:

- fast or difficult breathing;
- bluish or dark-coloured lips or skin;
- drowsiness to the point where he or she cannot be easily wakened;
- severe crankiness or not wanting to be held; or
- dehydration – not drinking enough fluids and not going to the bathroom regularly.

How to care for yourself

If you do get the flu, there are some things you can do to make yourself feel better and avoid spreading the virus to others. Stay home and get plenty of rest if you're sick. Clean your hands frequently with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, particularly after coughing or blowing your nose. Also, remember to cough or sneeze into your sleeve if you don't have a tissue available.

To ease the symptoms of the flu:

- drink lots of fluids;
- avoid drinks with caffeine;
- take basic pain or fever relievers;
- do not give acetylsalicylic acid (ASA or Aspirin®) to children or teenagers under the age of 16;
- apply heat for short periods of time using a hot water bottle or heating pad to reduce muscle pain;
- take a warm bath;

- gargle with a glass of warm water or suck on hard candy or lozenges;
- use saline drops or spray for a stuffy nose; and
- avoid alcohol and tobacco.

Resources

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Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze and dispose of tissue. Cough into your upper sleeve if you don't have a tissue.



Avoid large crowds of people where viruses can spread easily. Stay home when you are sick.



Keep common surfaces and items clean and disinfected.

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Handwashing

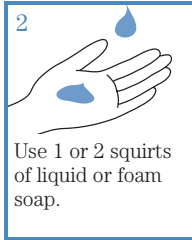
To wash hands properly, rub all parts of the hands and wrists with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub. Wash hands for at least 15 seconds or more. Pay special attention to fingertips, between fingers, backs of hands and base of the thumbs.


- Keep nails short
- Remove watches, rings and bracelets
- Do not use artificial nails
- Avoid chipped nail varnish
- Wash wrists and forearms if they are likely to have been contaminated
- Make sure that sleeves are rolled up and do not get wet during washing

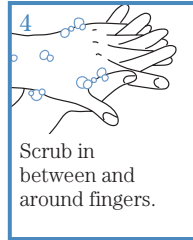
If you have any questions regarding cuts, sores, allergies or pre-existing skin conditions, call Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000, TTY 1-866-797-0007.

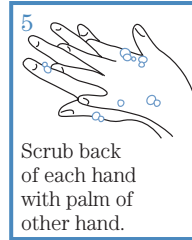
Handwashing with soap and water


- 


Remove jewellery and wet hands and wrists with warm water.
- 

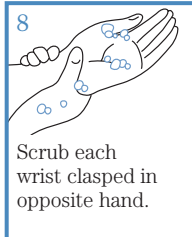
Use 1 or 2 squirts of liquid or foam soap.
- 


Lather soap and scrub hands well, palm to palm.
- 


Scrub in between and around fingers.
- 

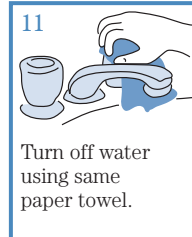
Scrub back of each hand with palm of other hand.
- 

Scrub fingertips of each hand in opposite palm.
- 

Scrub each thumb clasped in opposite hand.
- 

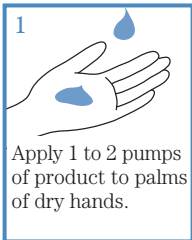
Scrub each wrist clasped in opposite hand.
- 


Rinse thoroughly under running water.
- 

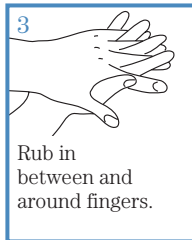
Pat hands dry with paper towel.
- 

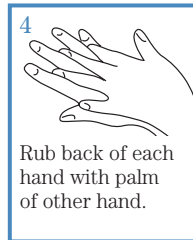
Turn off water using same paper towel.


Cleaning with alcohol-based hand rub


- 


Apply 1 to 2 pumps of product to palms of dry hands.
- 


Rub hands together, palm to palm.
- 

Rub in between and around fingers.
- 

Rub back of each hand with palm of other hand.
- 

Rub fingertips of each hand in opposite palm.
- 

Rub each thumb clasped in opposite hand.
- 

Rub each wrist clasped in opposite hand.
- 

Rub hands until product is dry. Do not use paper towels.

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