

H1N1 Flu Update

Although the incidence of H1N1 flu has decreased in the United States, and in many other countries around the world, on February 23, 2010, the World Health Organization (WHO) decided to maintain its classification at Phase 6, i.e., full-blown pandemic. This is because countries in Western Africa are now experiencing new communitywide transmission of the H1N1 virus, and the southern hemisphere is about to enter its winter influenza season. In addition, the possibility of another wave of the illness occurring in the northern hemisphere has not been ruled out. The WHO will reconvene in several weeks to review the status of the pandemic.

Vaccination is the most effective method for preventing flu and flu-related complications, and H1N1 vaccine is currently in good supply. It is not too late to be vaccinated against H1N1, and the CDC is now recommending that everyone from age 6 months upwards consider being immunized. **(Individuals with severe or life-threatening allergies to chicken eggs should not be vaccinated.)**

What is H1N1 Flu?

H1N1 flu is a new strain of the Influenza A virus that is a combination of pig, bird and human viruses that humans may have no natural immunity to. It is a highly contagious acute respiratory disease. Symptoms include fever greater than 100° F, coughing, joint aches, severe headache, and in some cases, runny nose, sore throat, vomiting and diarrhea.

What to do to protect yourself against swine flu:

- Wash hands frequently with soap and water. (Alcohol-based or anti-bacterial hand sanitizers also work.)
- Cover up coughs and sneezes with a tissue, and discard used tissues in the trash.
- Avoid close contact with sick people.

What to do if you get the flu:

- Contact your healthcare provider.
- Stay home from work or school until 24 hours after temperature returns to normal (without medication).
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.

Are medications available to treat infection with this new virus?

- Yes, the Centers for Disease Control recommend the use of Tamiflu® or Relenza® for the treatment and/or prevention of infection with novel H1N1 flu.
- Currently, the priority use for these medications is to treat severe influenza illness.

For up-to-date information, please refer to the following websites:

- Centers for Disease Control (CDC): www.cdc.gov/swineflu/
- Dept. of Health and Human Services (DHHS): www.dhhs.gov/
- World Health Organization (WHO): www.who.int/en/

