

Advice for parents and carers of children regarding H1N1 flu virus

The main route of transmission of the H1N1 virus seems to be similar to seasonal influenza, via droplets that are expelled by speaking, sneezing or coughing.

The incubation period for the virus is 2 to 5 days and causes a person to be contagious for 10 days. Stay at home until you are free of symptoms.

You can prevent getting infected by avoiding close contact with people who show influenza-like symptoms (trying to maintain a distance of about 1 metre if possible) and taking the following measures:

- avoid touching your mouth and nose;
- clean hands thoroughly with soap and water, or cleanse them with an alcohol-based hand rub on a regular basis (especially if touching the mouth and nose, or surfaces that are potentially contaminated);
- clean hard surfaces regularly with standard cleaning products (hot water and soap)
- cover your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing, use a tissue if possible (dispose of tissues in bin with tight-fitting lid) , wash hands afterwards;
- avoid close contact with people who might be ill;
- reduce the time spent in crowded settings if possible;
- improve airflow in your living space by opening windows;
- practice good health habits including adequate sleep, eating nutritious food, and keeping physically active;
- ensure your children follow this advice

You will not be able to tell the difference between seasonal flu and H1N1 without medical help. Typical symptoms to watch for are similar to seasonal viruses and include:

- fever (38°C or above)
- cough
- headache
- aching muscles, limb or joint pain
- sore throat
- runny nose and sneezing
- loss of appetite
- chills
- diarrhoea/vomiting
- tiredness

Only a medical practitioner can confirm a case of H1N1.

If you are not sick you do not have to wear a mask. Incorrect use of masks actually increases the chance of spreading infection

If you are caring for a sick person, you can wear a mask when you are in close contact with the ill person and dispose of it immediately after contact, and cleanse your hands thoroughly afterwards.

If you are sick and must travel or be around others, cover your mouth and nose.

A person should seek medical care if they experience shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, or if a fever continues more than three days.

For children aged 1 -13 years seek immediate medical advice if they have a temperature of 38°C, flu-like symptoms and any of the following:

- severe breathing problems, grunting or noisy breaths when at rest
- appear to be extremely floppy or sleepy
- severe dehydration, with sunken eyes and dry, wrinkly skin
- changes in skin colour, very pale or blue-ish
- appear to be unusually irritable or agitated
- fits

Swine flu is being treated with antiviral drugs such as Tamiflu and Relenza. Antiviral drugs work by preventing the flu virus from reproducing - to be effective you need to take them within 48 hours of the symptoms beginning. This can reduce the risk of complications and possibly shorten the illness by a day.

These medicines are prescribed at a doctor's discretion.

Antiviral drugs will only be given to people who have a positive diagnosis of swine flu.

Antiviral drugs will not be given as a preventative measure.

People with underlying health conditions are known to be more at risk of experiencing complications from the flu.

If you or a child has underlying health conditions and has flu-like symptoms you should seek immediate medical advice.

It is already known that people are particularly vulnerable if they have:

- chronic (long-term) lung disease,
- chronic heart disease,
- chronic kidney disease,
- chronic liver disease,
- chronic neurological disease (neurological disorders include motor neurone disease, multiple sclerosis and Parkinson's disease),
- immunosuppression (whether caused by disease or treatment), or
- diabetes mellitus.

Also at risk of complications are:

- patients who have had drug treatment for asthma in the past three years,
- pregnant women,
- people aged 65 and over, and
- children under five.