

Frequently Asked Questions—H1N1 Influenza

What is H1N1 influenza?

H1N1 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, probably in much the same way that regular seasonal influenza viruses spread.

What are the signs and symptoms of H1N1 influenza?

The symptoms of H1N1 flu in people are similar to the symptoms of seasonal flu and include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. A significant number of people, particularly children, who have been infected with H1N1 have reported diarrhea and vomiting. Symptoms usually appear one to three days after exposure.

How long can an infected person spread this virus to others?

People may be contagious from one day before they develop symptoms to up to seven days after they get sick. Children, especially younger children, might potentially be contagious for longer periods.

Is there a vaccine to protect against H1N1?

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is advising states that vaccine companies are working on producing an H1N1 vaccination. The CDC thinks that H1N1 vaccine may be available as early as mid-October, but it could be later in the fall/winter. The Department of Health is planning for mass vaccination clinics to protect people against H1N1 and seasonal flu.

Do I need to get the regular (seasonal) flu vaccine in addition to the H1N1 vaccine?

Yes. You will need a separate vaccination to protect against seasonal influenza. The Department of Health and private healthcare providers will have vaccine available for seasonal influenza in the early fall. People should go to their private provider for vaccine. The Department of Health provides free influenza vaccine in public health offices in every county to people who are uninsured and can't get vaccine elsewhere. The Department of Health will announce the dates, times and locations of clinics when the vaccine is received in the fall.

Where can I get a shot for H1N1 influenza?

The CDC has been told that H1N1 vaccine may be available as early as mid-October, but it could be later in the fall/winter. The Department of Health is planning for mass vaccination clinics to protect people against H1N1 and seasonal flu. Watch the local media for an announcement or check the H1N1 webpage at <http://www.health.state.nm.us/H1N1/index.shtml> for a clinic. Vaccine may be available from your personal doctor.

How much does the vaccination cost?

If you have insurance, it will pay for the vaccination. If you do not have insurance, the vaccination will be covered by the health department; **NO ONE WILL BE TURNED AWAY BECAUSE THEY CANNOT PAY.**

When will vaccinations start?

Vaccinations for seasonal flu will begin in September. Everyone will be able to receive a shot.

If plenty of vaccine for the H1N1 virus is available, everyone will be offered a vaccination as soon as the vaccine is ready, probably October. If the vaccine supply is low, the CDC will guide us on prioritizing based on how the H1N1 vaccine can be used most effectively.

The following subgroups will be the first to receive vaccine:

- Pregnant women;
- Household and caregiver contacts of children less than 6 months old;
- Health care and EMS personnel with direct medical contact with patients or infectious material;
- Children 6-59 months of age;
- Children <19 years of age with chronic medical conditions that put them at increased risk of complications due to influenza;
- Adults <65 years old who are at risk for complications from influenza due to chronic health conditions or compromised immune systems;

As more vaccine becomes available, more people will be vaccinated.

Will wearing a mask protect me from getting H1N1 influenza?

Masks are not recommended for the general public as prevention from getting sick with H1N1 influenza. Masks are used in healthcare settings on people who are already sick to prevent them from spreading the virus to others.

What can I do to protect myself from getting sick?

Take these everyday steps to protect your health:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.

How severe is H1N1 influenza?

H1N1 illness has been mild so far in New Mexico and it's not known at this time if the strain will become more severe. The Department of Health is planning for the potential increase in the number and severity of H1N1 flu cases in the fall. Pregnant women and children and adults with chronic medical conditions such as asthma, diabetes and obesity are at risk for developing serious complications from H1N1 influenza. Adults over age 65 appear to be protected against H1N1 influenza.

What treatment is available for H1N1 influenza?

Some antiviral medications may be effective to reduce the severity of H1N1 influenza. Rest, liquids and over-the-counter medicine are the usual treatments. Antibiotics will not cure the flu. Aspirin should not be given to children with influenza because of the possibility of causing a complication called Reye syndrome.

What should I do if I get sick?

If you are sick with influenza-like symptoms you should stay home and avoid contact with other people until you feel well enough to return to work or school and have not had a fever for 24 hours. If you have severe illness that includes fever, cough, sore throat, chills and fatigue, or you are at high risk for flu complications, contact your health care provider or seek medical care. Your health care provider will determine whether flu testing or treatment is needed.

When should I seek emergency medical care?

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

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish or gray skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- 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

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
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough

Is there anything I can do to help New Mexico prepare for H1N1?

Yes. Due to the increase in the number of vaccinations, the Department of Health is recruiting additional health care professionals to help vaccinate people or potentially respond to an emergency. We will also need volunteers to assist in other ways at vaccination clinics, such as helping with registration or setting up clinic sites. To volunteer through the NMserve database, a statewide registry of volunteers, go to www.nmserves.org or call Bobbie MacKenzie at 505-476-8302.

As the flu season unfolds, remember to check back with the Department of Health website for updates: <http://www.health.state.nm.us/H1N1/index.shtml>

And your local Public Health Office: