

Influenza Questions and Answers

What is influenza?

Influenza (also known as the flu) is a contagious respiratory illness caused by viruses. Seasonal flu and novel H1N1 are both influenza viruses that can cause mild to severe illness. Influenza usually comes on suddenly and typically includes fever, cough, and sore throat, as well as headache, extreme tiredness, runny or stuffy nose, and muscle aches. Nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea are other flu symptoms.

Who should be vaccinated?

Everyone age 6 months and older is encouraged to receive the seasonal flu vaccine (unless they previously had an adverse reaction to a vaccine or have an allergy to chicken eggs). A vaccine for novel H1N1 is expected sometime in October and will be made available to people at high risk for influenza, as well as health-care providers. As more of the novel H1N1 vaccine becomes available it is expected that the state health department will revise its recommendations.

Will the seasonal influenza vaccine also protect against the novel H1N1 influenza?

No. The seasonal influenza vaccine will not protect against novel H1N1 influenza.

Should I be tested for novel H1N1? What about antiviral medication?

The decision to test for influenza (either seasonal or novel H1N1) is being left up to health-care providers, but in general, there is no benefit to testing generally healthy people for the virus. Patients admitted to the hospital are tested for influenza, as are high-risk patients. Antiviral medication is not currently recommended, except for people at high risk for complications or who have severe illness.

Who needs to call or visit a health-care provider?

Most children and adults in generally good health will recover from the flu without needing to visit a health-care provider.

People at increased risk for flu complications should call their regular provider to determine whether they should be seen.

High-risk patients include:

- Children under age 5 – especially those under age 2
- Adults age 65 or older
- Pregnant women
- People with chronic health conditions such as asthma, diabetes or other conditions affecting the heart, lungs, blood, liver or kidneys
- People with weakened immune systems
- People under age 18 on long-term aspirin therapy

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When should I see a health-care provider right away?

If you become ill and experience any of the following warning signs, go to an emergency room or urgent-care center.

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

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish or gray skin color (call 911 immediately)
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Not waking up or not interacting
- Being so irritable that the child doesn't want to be held
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and cough

For 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 cough

What should I do if I think I have the flu?

- If you have the flu, you may be ill for a week or longer. Please stay home, except if you need medical care, so you can recover and prevent others from becoming ill.
- Drink plenty of liquids and rest as much as possible.
- Avoid travel.
- Do not go to work or school until your fever has been gone for at least 24 hours.
- Fever-reducing pain relievers such as ibuprofen (Motrin) and acetaminophen (Tylenol) are effective in helping relieve some symptoms.

What should I do if I'm caring for someone with the flu?

Influenza is transmitted primarily through respiratory droplets from a cough, sneeze, or other body fluids. People with the flu should limit their contact with others as much as possible. You should ask the person you're caring for to cover their mouth and nose when they sneeze or cough. You should clean your hands often by washing with soap and water and using alcohol-based gels and wipes.

Visit <http://healthcare.utah.edu> for more influenza information.

