



Rutland Regional Medical Center

An Affiliate of Rutland Regional Health Services

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Seasonal and Novel H1N1 Flu: A Guide for Parents

What is the Flu?

The flu is an infection of the nose, throat and lungs caused by influenza viruses. There are many different flu viruses and sometimes a new flu virus emerges to make people sick.

What is novel H1N1 flu?

Novel H1N1 flu is a new and very different influenza virus that is spreading worldwide among people. This new virus was called “swine flu” at first because it has pieces of flu viruses found in pigs in the past. However, novel H1N1 virus has not been found in pigs in the US.

Influenza is unpredictable, but scientists believe that the new H1N1 virus will cause illness and deaths in the United States over the coming months. This flu season, the new virus may cause a lot more people to get sick than during a regular flu season. It also may cause more deaths than seasonal flu.

How serious is the flu?

The flu can be very serious, especially for younger children and children of any age who have chronic medical conditions. These conditions include asthma or other lung problems, diabetes, weakened immune systems, kidney disease, heart problems, and neurological and neuromuscular disorders. These conditions can result in more severe illness from influenza, including the new H1N1 virus.

How does flu spread?

Both novel H1N1 and seasonal flu are thought to spread mostly from person to person through the coughs and sneezes of people who are sick with influenza. People also may get sick by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose.

What are the symptoms of the flu?

Symptoms of seasonal flu and novel H1N1 flu include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people may also have vomiting and diarrhea.

How long can a sick person spread the flu to others?

People infected with seasonal and novel H1N1 flu shed virus and may be able to infect others from one day before getting sick to 5 to 7 days after. This may be longer in some people, especially children with weakened immune systems and in people infected with novel H1N1 flu.

How can I protect my child against flu?

Get a seasonal flu vaccine for yourself and your child to protect against seasonal flu viruses. Take everyday steps to prevent the spread of all flu viruses. This includes:

- 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. If soap and water are not available hand sanitizers are also effective.

- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Teach you child to cover a cough and wash their hands as well.
- Try to keep you child from having close contact with sick people, including anyone in the household who is sick.
- Keep surfaces like bedside tables, bathroom surfaces, kitchen counters and toys for children clean by wiping them with a household disinfectant.
- Throw away tissues used by sick person in your household in the trash.

Is there a vaccine to protect my child from H1N1 flu?

A vaccine against novel H1N1 flu is being produced and will be available this season to help prevent the new H1N1 flu. A vaccine against seasonal flu is available each year.

Is there medicine to treat the flu?

Antiviral drugs can treat both types of flu. These drugs can make people feel better and get better sooner, but they need to be prescribed by a doctor. They work best when started during the first 2 days of illness. These drugs can be given to children. These drugs are primarily used to treat people who are seriously ill or who have a medical condition that puts them at high risk of serious complications from the flu.

What can I do if my child gets sick?

If your child is 5 years or older and otherwise healthy and gets flu-like symptoms, including a fever and/or cough, talk to your doctor if needed and make sure your child gets plenty of rest and drinks enough fluids.

If your child is younger than 5, or any age and has a medical condition like asthma, diabetes, or a neurologic problem and develops flu like symptoms, including a fever and/or cough, call your doctor or get medical attention. This is because younger children and children who have chronic medical conditions (*like asthma or diabetes*) may be at high risk of serious complications from flu infection, including the new H1N1 flu. Talk to your doctor early if you are worried about your child's illness.

What if my child seems very sick?

Even children who have always been healthy before can get a severe case of flu. Call or take you child to a doctor right away if your child of any age has:

- 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
- Other conditions (*like heart or lung disease, diabetes, or asthma*) and develops flu-like symptoms, including a fever and/or cough

Can my child go to school or day care if he or she is sick?

No. Your child should stay home to rest and to avoid giving the flu to other children.

When can my child go back to school after having the flu?

Keep you child home from school, day care or camp for at least 24 hours after their fever is gone. (*Their fever should be gong without them having taken a fever-reducing medicine.*) A fever is defined as 100°F.