



C. Earl Hunter, Commissioner

Promoting and protecting the health of the public and the environment

Frequently Asked Questions about Novel H1N1 Flu for Parents

How severe is illness associated with the new type of flu?

So far, the new type of H1N1 flu virus, also called Novel H1N1, has been similar to the seasonal flu we see each year.

It is important to remember that during a regular flu season, influenza can cause mild to severe illness and sometimes leads to death. Each year, in the United States, on average 36,000 people die from flu-related complications and more than 200,000 people are hospitalized from flu-related causes.

Some people are more likely to become very ill if they catch the new flu virus. These include children under age 5, pregnant women, children who take medicines that contain aspirin, and people of any age with some chronic medical conditions. If your child has a medical condition like asthma, heart or lung problems, diabetes, immune system problems, or another serious health problem, talk to your doctor or clinic about how to keep your child healthy in flu season.

How does the Novel Influenza H1N1 virus spread?

The virus spreads the same the same way that regular, seasonal flu spreads. People spread flu viruses easily from person to person through coughing or sneezing. Sometimes people may become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose.

What can I do to keep my child from getting sick?

It is important to teach your children how to reduce the risk of getting the flu and how to protect others from becoming infected.

- **Teach your children to wash their hands often.** Wash with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds, which is about as long as it takes to sing the “Happy Birthday” song twice.
- **Teach your children the proper use of hand sanitizers.** Gels, rubs and hand wipes all work well, as long as they contain at least 60 percent alcohol. Check with your school administrator to see if gels with alcohol are allowed at school.
- **Teach your children to cough or sneeze into their sleeve—not their hands!** Cover coughs and sneezes with tissues or by coughing into the inside of their elbow. Everyone should wash hands after blowing their nose or coughing into a tissue.
- **Teach your children to avoid touching their nose, mouth or eyes.** They should keep their hands away from their face.

How do I know if my child has the flu?

Symptoms of both the novel H1N1 flu and regular, seasonal flu are similar. They include sudden onset of fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and extreme tiredness. Some people who have been infected with the novel H1N1 flu virus also have reported upset stomach, diarrhea and vomiting.

What should I do if my child is sick?

Flu spreads easily. If your child has fever with a temperature over 100 degrees Fahrenheit, sore throat and/or cough, he or she could have the flu.

- It is important that your child stay home from school or other places where your child might spread the flu to other people. This includes group childcare, after school programs or clubs, church programs, the mall or sporting events.
- Call your doctor or clinic about your child's symptoms and history. They can advise you whether your child needs treatment or testing.
- When you call the school to notify them that your child is sick, please tell the school nurse if your child has flu-like symptoms such as fever, a sore throat, or cough.
- Anyone with flu-like symptoms should stay home until the symptoms have gone away. This includes having no fever, or signs of a fever, for at least 24 hours without using medicine to reduce the fever.

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

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish or gray skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Not urinating or no tears when crying
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Being very sleepy or confused, not waking up or interacting
- Being so irritable that nothing makes the child feel better
- Pain or pressure in the chest or stomach area
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough.

Can my child get a shot to prevent the swine flu?

There are several companies working to develop a vaccination for novel H1N1 flu. We expect that this shot will start to be available in the fall. DHEC and healthcare providers will focus on children in school and child care to get early shots, in order to protect them and the people in their families. You will hear on the news and from the school when vaccines for the "swine flu" and "regular" or seasonal flu arrive in your community.

What are schools doing about the flu?

- School nurses and other staff will work closely with parents and teachers to insure that sick children do not attend school. School exclusion guidelines require that children with fever 100 or higher and respiratory symptoms do NOT attend school (School Exclusion guidelines can be seen at <http://www.scdhec.gov/health/disease/exclusion.htm>.)
- Careful hand washing is important in preventing the spread of disease, including the new type of H1N1 flu, also known as the swine flu. School Nurses will continue to work with students, faculty, staff on hand washing, and “Covering Your Cough” education programs.
- All school nurses, food services staff, principals, teachers and school staff are working to prevent the spread of novel H1N1 flu virus at school. Their work includes communication about signs of the flu, information on when to stay home, and sharing how to protect staff and students through activities like hand washing.
- DHEC is working with school districts and school nurses to identify when students should be sent home, when barriers like surgical face masks or gloves are needed, and to provide education to faculty, staff, students, and families.

Will my child’s school be closed if there is a case of swine flu?

School closure has sometimes been used to slow the spread of flu in a community. The decision to close schools would involve carefully considering the potential impact of school closure on the vital service of educating children. DHEC is focusing on ways to keep schools and students healthy so that educational activities are not disrupted. If schools are closed due to flu, children will should stay at home and not go into the community.