



Facts about the H1N1 flu

September 9, 2009

Pandemic H1N1 influenza means that a new influenza virus is circulating all over the world. Several hundred cases have been confirmed in Oregon, with about 1-in-every 4 cases coming from Multnomah County. The National Centers for Disease Control and Prevention expects that people will keep getting sick with this new influenza during the next several months, and that the number of people affected will peak some time from October to January.

How severe is it?

Most people infected with this new virus have symptoms similar to seasonal influenza, including a cough, sore throat, body aches and pains and a fever. Influenza is a respiratory disease, but ill people can also experience diarrhea and vomiting. The concern with this new influenza virus is that some otherwise healthy people – especially young adults -- have become sick enough to need hospitalization or have died from influenza-related complications. Unlike with seasonal flu, few cases have emerged among people age 65 and older.

How is it spread?

H1N1 can be spread when someone with the flu coughs or sneezes on you, or when you touch something with flu virus on it and then touch your eyes, nose, or mouth.

Is there a vaccine?

A vaccine has been developed specifically for this new virus and is expected to be available this fall. Planners anticipate that there will be enough vaccine for all who need it. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends vaccination for the following groups:

- Pregnant women;
- Families and caregivers of infants younger than 6 months;
- Anyone younger than 25, other than infants;
- Adults 25 to 64 with underlying medical conditions;
- Healthcare and emergency medical workers.

What can I do?

There are everyday actions that can help prevent the spread of germs that cause respiratory illnesses like influenza:

- Cover your cough and sneeze into your sleeve or a tissue.
- Clean your hands, especially after sneezing and coughing, with soap and water, or with alcohol-based hand cleaners.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.
- If you are sick, stay home from work or school, and generally avoid going out in public. Remain home until 24 hours after your fever goes away.
- If you are an employer, encourage sick employees to stay home.
- If you are a parent, keep sick children out of daycare, camps, and events.

What if I become sick?

If you do develop possible flu symptoms and you want to consult your health care provider, call before going in for an office visit. You may not need to go in, and if you do need to be seen, a time should be set up when you will not risk exposing others to influenza in the waiting room. People at particularly high risk for complications from H1N1 include:

- Pregnant women;
- People with chronic health conditions such as asthma, diabetes, heart disease, kidney disease, liver disease, or blood diseases, and;
- People with immune systems impaired by medications or conditions such as HIV.

Where can I learn more?

Ask your health care provider about your risk for flu complications and your need for vaccination. You can also find on-going flu updates at:

- Clackamas County's H1N1 website: www.clackamas.us/swineflu
- the Oregon Public Health Division website: www.flu.oregon.gov
- the CDC 24-hour hotline: toll-free: 1-800-232-4636 | TTY: 1-888-232-6348