

Important Influenza 2009 H1N1 Information for Families and Visitors

The following information will help you protect yourself, your family, other patients, and the staff of the hospital.

Recognize the symptoms of Influenza (Flu)

- fever (temperature >100° F)
- cough
- sore throat
- tiredness
- headache
- muscle aches.

If you are experiencing these symptoms, contact your health care provider. If you need to visit your doctor's office, call in advance and let them know you have symptoms of Flu. Do not come to the emergency department for routine medical care.

Do not visit patients if you have the symptoms listed above or if you have been ill with these symptoms in the past 7 days.

If you are experiencing chest pain, shortness of breath, or a medical emergency, call 911.

Facts about Influenza Infection

The influenza virus is spread by the tiny droplets expelled when an infected person coughs or sneezes. These respiratory droplets do not usually remain airborne as they are heavy enough to quickly fall out of the air; however, they can spread approximately 3-6 feet from the infected individual. Infection can result from breathing in these droplets before they fall or by touching a surface on which the droplets landed (such as a doorknob or computer keyboard) and then touching the mucous membranes of the mouth, nose, or eyes. Depending on conditions, the virus may live for 1-2 days on hard surfaces.

A person infected with influenza can spread the virus in their respiratory droplets for about 24 hours before they begin to feel ill and will continue to expel the virus in respiratory secretions for about 7 days after they develop symptoms (children may spread the virus for up to 10 days after the start of illness).

Caring for a Person Infected with Influenza at Home

The ill person should:

- Avoid contact with healthy family members
- If possible, stay in a separate room with the door closed
- If possible, use a separate bathroom that is cleaned daily with household disinfectant
- Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue and dispose of the tissue in the trash
- Wear a surgical-type mask, if available
- Not go out to go to work, school, the store, or anywhere else

- Drink plenty of fluids and eat a healthy diet as possible
- Get plenty of rest
- Take over the counter medications (e.g. to treat fever, congestion, cough) as needed to support you through the illness
- Children (18 years and under) should NOT take aspirin or aspirin-containing products (e.g. bismuth subsalicylate – Pepto Bismol) if influenza is suspected because of the risk of Reye syndrome, a rare but serious complication. For children, other medications such as acetaminophen (e.g. Tylenol) or ibuprofen (e.g. Advil or Motrin) may be used for relief of fever.
- Continue to stay at home during the time that are most likely to spread the infection to others (7 days after the *start of illness* for adults, and 10 days after the *start of illness* for children).

Other people in the house should:

- Discourage visitors
- If possible, have only one adult in the home care for sick persons. Because this adult may be at higher risk of becoming infected and may spread the virus to others even before feeling ill, he or she should wear a surgical mask when leaving the house.
- Avoid having pregnant women care for the sick person
- Try to stay away from the ill person, or stay 6 or more feet away
- Wash their hands with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand gel frequently, including after every contact with a sick person or the person's room or bathroom.
- Encourage the ill person to drink plenty of fluids, eat a nourishing diet, and get plenty of rest.
- Not use the ill person's plates, silverware, towel, or toothbrush
- Wash the ill person's sheets and clothing with detergent and tumble dry on high heat
- Wash any other items touched by the ill person with soap and water or clean with disinfectant wipes
- Monitor the ill person for signs of potential need for specialized health care, such as
 - *shortness of breath or increasing difficulty breathing*
 - *Persistently high fever (temperature greater than 102° F) despite taking appropriate medications such as Tylenol (acetaminophen) or ibuprofen (Advil or Motrin)*
 - *Mental confusion or Lethargy (i.e., not alert or responding to normal stimuli)*
- If the ill person shows signs of worsening or if uncertain, contact your primary care physician

The State Department of Health has set up a new Flu Information Line at (866)767-5044 where the public can call to get up-to-date facts on H1N1 influenza. The Flu Information Line is toll-free and staffed by trained professionals who will answer questions from Monday through Friday from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., and on weekends from 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. In addition, recorded messages (updated daily at 7 a.m.) are accessible seven days a week, 24 hours a day.