

H1N1 Frequently Asked Questions

2009 – 2010 Flu Season

1. How is pandemic (H1N1 or Swine) influenza different from seasonal flu?

Pandemic influenza is caused by an influenza virus that is new to people.

- Seasonal flu is caused by viruses that are already among people.
- H1N1 influenza (flu) is a new flu virus of swine origin that first caused illness in Mexico and the United States in March and April, 2009.
- Fewer people are immune to the H1N1 virus because they haven't been exposed to it before and don't have immunity.

The timing of an influenza pandemic is difficult to predict.

- Seasonal flu occurs every year, usually during winter.
- Pandemic influenza has happened about 30 times in recorded history.
- The H1N1 flu could last longer than the typical flu season.

H1N1 influenza is likely to be more widespread than seasonal flu.

- H1N1 influenza is likely to affect more people than seasonal flu.
- H1N1 influenza is affecting a somewhat different set of the population, including children and young adults.
- If H1N1 flu is severe, it could change daily life for a time, including limitations on travel and public gathering

2. How concerned should people be about H1N1 influenza?

Even if H1N1 flu stays mild we need to take it very seriously.

- Many people in our community will likely become ill, especially school age children.
- Pregnant woman and those with heart and lung conditions tend to have more serious symptoms and can even die.
- Because H1N1 is likely to be so widespread, even a mild pandemic will probably cause intermittent disruptions, especially in schools and work. Our Healthcare system will be overloaded and disruptions may occur in the delivery of goods and services.

Businesses, communities, and individuals should be prepared.

- Businesses, schools, civic groups, churches, friends and family should take action NOW to prepare for the eventual increase of flu in our community.
- Businesses should prepare by prioritizing work duties, cross-training staff, and **encouraging sick people to stay at home** until they won't spread germs to other employees.
- Businesses should have a plan for continuing operations or services without putting others at risk.

Prepare before flu season.

- Make a kit of emergency supplies including soup, crackers, fever reducer, etc.
- Make a plan to stay home for 24 hours after fever ends (without help of fever reducing medication)
- Stay informed - information can change quickly. Check www.pandemicflu.gov for national news and information.

3. Why should we make an emergency kit and plan to stay home?

Even a mild pandemic will probably cause intermittent disruptions.

- Schools, daycares and businesses may close temporarily if a large number of students or staff has flu.
- Our Healthcare system will be overloaded.
- Delivery of goods and services may be interrupted.

Disruptions will be less stressful if plans are already in place.

- Parents should have a plan for childcare if school is closed and they need to work.
- Businesses may be able to continue operations through alternative means.
- Schools, businesses, churches and other community organizations will have a plan in place in the event someone gets flu, or if flu becomes widespread.

Having an emergency kit of foods, medicine and other necessities will make staying at home easier.

- Those with flu will be asked to stay home until they're no longer contagious.
- If flu is widespread, people may be asked to avoid crowds and will stay at home.
- If goods and services are interrupted, those with an emergency kit will be less impacted

4. How many people are likely to get sick with H1N1 flu?

How many will die?

The consequences of pandemic flu are difficult to predict.

- Pandemic influenza has occurred three times in the last century.
- The most recent, in 1967, was the mildest.
- Experts continue to learn more about this flu and information is changing constantly.

During a pandemic such as H1N1 many people will be infected.

- Between April –June 2009, over one million people in the US are estimated to have had novel H1N1 flu.
- As of 9-12-09, CT has had 1992 confirmed cases; however, most people sick with flu have not been tested.
- Past flu pandemics have infected ¼ to ½ of the population. H1N1 has the potential to impact the lives of many, many people in our community.

In general, some people are at greater risk for illness and death.

- Pregnant women and those who already have a health problem are often at higher risk.
- People with weakened immune systems (for example transplant patients) are likely to be at higher risk.
- So far, H1N1 flu is infecting pregnant women and healthy people under 25 years of age (compared to Seasonal flu which infects mostly older people, very young children, and people with certain chronic health conditions).

5. What Public Health plans are in place to help the community if H1N1 flu becomes more widespread?

In our area

- Ledge Light, L&M, and other partners have developed, tested, and improved their plans for handling pandemic flu for several years.
- Plans are in place to provide the public with seasonal flu vaccine and H1N1 flu vaccine when it becomes available.
- Plans are in place to use and distribute national stockpiles of medicines, masks and gloves, if or when needed.

In Connecticut

- Plans are in place and have been tested and improved for delivering stockpiles of medicines, masks and gloves to local health departments when needed.
- CT Department of Health serves as a liaison between local health and the CDC.
- The State Laboratory has guidelines in place to test and monitor flu as needed.

In the United States

- The U.S. government has budgeted over a billion dollars for flu vaccine purchase and planning.
- Several systems have been set up to rapidly share emergency health information.
- Plans are in place to deliver stockpiles of medicines, masks and gloves to each state quickly, as needed

6. Should I get a flu shot? When? Where?

Seasonal flu.

- Everyone needs to do all that they can to keep from getting the flu, including getting a seasonal flu vaccine.
- Those at high risk of complications from flu should get a flu shot every year. This includes:
 - all children aged 6 months--18 years,
 - all persons aged 50 years and older,
 - other adults at risk for medical complications from influenza,
 - all persons who live with or care for persons at high risk for influenza-related complications, including contacts of children aged <6 months.
- Plenty of vaccine should be available this year.

H1N1 flu.

- The CDC has determined priority groups to receive the vaccine. Within priority groups the vaccine will be provided to:
 - all persons 6 months – 24 years of age;
 - pregnant women;
 - household contacts and caregivers for children younger than 6 months of age;
 - healthcare and emergency medical services personnel;
 - persons aged 25-64 who have health conditions associated with higher risk of medical complications from influenza
- H1N1 vaccine is expected to arrive in periodic small shipments.
- One doses of H1N1 vaccine for >10 years; 2 doses 21 days apart for children < 10 years

When and where will shots be available?

- **Seasonal flu shots** are available through providers, VNA clinics and pharmacies
- **H1N1 vaccines** will be available in small shipments in October to the priority groups.

7. Why are there priority groups for the H1N1 vaccine? What are they?

There will be a limited amount of vaccine available.

- Time was required to create an appropriate vaccine.
- Vaccine had to be tested before approval for public distribution.
- Vaccine is being produced as quickly as possible, however production for entire U.S. population is difficult.

Priorities have been selected.

- Scientific and medical experts made the decision at the CDC in July 2009.
- Based on protecting people at highest risk of complications from flu.
- Also prioritized within specific health and emergency providers.

Priority levels depending on vaccine supply.

- On July 29, 2009, the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP)—an advisory committee to CDC—recommended that novel H1N1 flu vaccine be made available first to the following five groups:
 - Pregnant women
 - Health care workers and emergency medical responders
 - People caring for infants under 6 months of age.
 - Children and young adults from 6 months to 24 years
 - People 25-64 years of age with underlying medical conditions*
- Due to an initial decreased vaccine availability, CT DPH will be prioritizing target groups to ensure that we are reaching the most at risk populations. The initial supplies of vaccine will be given to the following:
 - Pregnant Women
 - Household contact of infants <6mo of age
 - Healthcare and EMS with direct patient contact
 - Children 6mo-4 years of age
 - Children 5-18 years of age with underlying health conditions*

*Persons who have chronic pulmonary conditions (including asthma), cardiovascular (except hypertension), renal, hepatic, cognitive, neurologic/neuromuscular, hematological or metabolic disorders (including diabetes mellitus) – persons who have immunosuppression (including immunosuppression caused by medications or by HIV).

8. Everyone needs to do all they can to keep from getting or spreading flu.

Protect your health.

- Get vaccinated for flu.
- Follow public health advice regarding school closures, avoiding crowds and other social distancing measures.
- Practice other flu prevention guidelines: avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth; try to avoid close contact with sick people

Protect the health of others.

- **Stay home if you are sick.**
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw away the tissue and wash your hands with soap and water. Alcohol-based hand cleansers are also effective.
- **Be prepared** to stay home for a few days if you get sick to avoid the need to make trips out in public while you are sick and contagious.

Stay home if you are sick.

- The CDC recommends that you stay home at least 24 hours after your fever is gone except to get medical care or for other necessities.
- Fever should be gone without the use of a fever-reducing medicine.
- Keep away from others as much as possible to prevent them from getting sick.

9. What should the public know when flu is widespread in the community?

Be alert to signs of flu.

- fever (usually high)
- headache
- extreme tiredness
- dry cough
- sore throat
- runny or stuffy nose
- muscle aches
- Stomach symptoms, such as nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea, also can occur but are more common in children than adults.

Should you go to the doctor?

- If you have severe illness or you are at high risk for flu complications, contact your health care provider. They will determine whether flu testing or treatment is needed.
- If you become ill and experience any of the following warning signs, seek emergency medical care.
 - In children, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:
 - 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
 - In 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 worse cough
- Call your doctor's office before making a visit.
- Employers and schools should not expect doctor's notes to return to work/school