

When to seek medical care for possible influenza, including influenza A H1N1 (swine flu)

What is influenza?

Influenza (also known as the flu) is a contagious respiratory illness caused by flu viruses. Seasonal flu and H1N1 are both influenza viruses that can cause mild to severe illness. Influenza usually comes on suddenly and typically includes fever and cough or sore throat. Other symptoms may include headache, extreme tiredness, runny or stuffy nose, or muscle aches. Nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea are other flu symptoms and are more common in children than adults.

Does everyone with the flu need to see a health care provider or get tested and treated?

Most children and adults with the flu who are generally in good health will recover without needing to visit a health care provider. Some people may want to call their health care provider for advice on how to care for the flu at home.

I think I have the flu. Can I get tested and treatment for H1N1 influenza or seasonal flu?

Testing and treatment is not needed or recommended for most children and adults who get the flu. Antiviral medication is not currently recommended except for people with the flu who are at higher risk for complications (see below) or have severe illness.

Who needs to call or visit a health care provider?

Children and adults who are ill and at high risk for flu complications and people with more severe flu symptoms should call their regular health care provider or go to an urgent care clinic or emergency department if they cannot reach their health care provider.

Whenever possible, **call** your health care provider to get advice on whether you need to be seen. Please do not go to an emergency department unless you have severe symptoms or a chronic condition that makes you at higher risk for flu complications and you cannot contact your health care provider.

General advice if you think you have the flu

If you are sick with the flu, you may be ill for a week or longer. Please stay home, except if you need medical care or other necessities, so you can get better and prevent others from getting ill. Drink plenty of fluids and rest as much as possible. Avoid travel.

Do not go to work or school until at least 24 hours after your fever is gone. Your fever should be gone without the use of fever-reducing medicine like acetaminophen (Tylenol.) and ibuprofen (Motrin).

If you leave the house to seek medical care, wear a facemask.

Wash your hands frequently with warm water and soap or use a hand sanitizer.

Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue or the sleeve of your elbow.

In general, avoid contact with other people as much as possible to keep from spreading your illness, especially those with one of the high-risk chronic conditions listed above.

Who is at increased risk for flu complications?

People at increased risk for flu complications are:

- Children younger than 5 years old – particularly children younger than 2 years old, for whom the risk for severe complications from seasonal influenza is highest.
- Adults 65 years of age or older
- Pregnant women
- Persons with the following conditions:
 - Chronic diseases of the lung (including asthma), heart (except hypertension), kidney, liver, blood (including sickle cell disease), brain or nervous system, muscles (particularly those that cause difficulty with swallowing), or metabolism (including diabetes mellitus);
 - Immunosuppression (weakened immune system) including that caused by medications or by HIV;
 - Persons younger than 19 years of age who are receiving long-term aspirin therapy, because of an increased risk for Reye syndrome.

When should I see a medical provider right away?

If you become ill and experience any of the following warning signs, go to an emergency room or urgent care center.

For **children**, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish or gray skin color (call 911 immediately)
- 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

For **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

More information:

Public Health – Seattle & King County's H1N1 influenza web page:

www.kingcounty.gov/health/H1N1

Public Health - Seattle & King County Hotline: 877-903-KING (5464)

TTY Relay: 711. Available in English and Spanish/Español

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) H1N1 flu information:

<http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/>