

# **A Guide for Parents: Novel H1N1 and Seasonal Flu**

## **August 2009**

### **What is the flu?**

Influenza (the flu) is an infection of the nose, throat, and lungs caused by influenza viruses. There are many different flu viruses and sometimes a new flu virus emerges to make people sick.

### **What is novel H1N1 (“swine”) flu?**

Novel H1N1 flu is a new and different influenza virus. It is probably spreading the same way that the regular seasonal influenza viruses spread. This new virus was first detected in people in the United States in April 2009.

This flu season, the new virus may cause a lot more people to get sick than during a regular flu season.

### **How serious is the flu?**

The flu can be very serious, especially for younger children and those who have one or more chronic medical conditions. These conditions include asthma or other lung problems, diabetes, weakened immune systems, kidney disease, heart problems, and/or neurological and neuromuscular disorders. These conditions can result in a more severe form of the flu.

### **How does the flu spread?**

Both novel H1N1 flu and seasonal flu are thought to spread mostly from person to person through the coughs and sneezes of people who are sick with influenza. People also may get sick by touching their mouth or nose after touching something with flu viruses on it.

### **What are the symptoms of the flu?**

Symptoms of the seasonal flu and novel H1N1 flu include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people also may have vomiting and diarrhea.

### **How long can a sick person spread the flu to others?**

People infected with either the flu shed viruses and may infect others from 1 day before feeling sick to 5-7 days after. This can be longer in some people, especially those with weakened immune systems and in people infected with novel H1N1 flu.

### **How can I protect my child against the flu?**

Get a seasonal flu vaccine for yourself and your child to protect against seasonal flu viruses.

Take everyday steps to prevent the spread of all flu viruses. These include:

1. Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
2. Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze.

If soap and water are not available, alcohol-based hand cleansers are also effective.

3. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
4. Avoid close contact (about 6 feet) with sick people, including anyone in the household who is sick.
5. Keep surfaces like bedside tables, bathroom and kitchen counters, and toys for children clean by wiping them down with a household disinfectant according to directions on the product label.
6. Throw away tissues and other disposable items used by sick persons in your household.

### **Is there a vaccine to protect my child from the flu?**

A vaccine against novel H1N1 flu is being produced and will be available in the coming months. A vaccine against seasonal flu is available each fall and winter.

### **Is there medicine to treat the flu?**

Antiviral drugs can treat both the seasonal flu and the novel H1N1 flu. A prescription from your doctor is needed to get the medication. They work best when started during the first 2 days of feeling sick. These drugs can be given to children when dose appropriately by your doctor and pharmacist.

### **What can I do if my child gets sick?**

If your child is 5 years or older and otherwise healthy, and has flu-like symptoms, consult your doctor. Also, make sure your child gets plenty of rest and drinks lots of clear fluids. Contact your doctor if your child is younger than 5, or of any age and has a medical condition like asthma, diabetes, or a neurologic problem, and develops flu-like symptoms. This is because younger children and children who have chronic medical conditions may be at higher risk for serious complications from the flu. Talk to your doctor early if you are worried about your child's illness.

### **What if my child seems very sick?**

Even children who have had the flu before can become severely infected by the flu. Call or take your child to a doctor right away if your child has these signs and symptoms:

1. Fast breathing or trouble breathing
2. Bluish or gray skin color
3. Not drinking enough fluids
4. Severe or persistent vomiting
5. Not waking up or not interacting as well as they normally do
6. Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
7. Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough
8. Has other conditions (like heart or lung disease, diabetes, or asthma) and develops flu-like symptoms

### **Can my child go to school, daycare or camp if he or she is sick?**

No. Your child should stay home to rest and to avoid giving the flu to other children.

**When can my child go back to school after having the flu?**

Keep your child home from school, daycare or camp for at least 24 hours after their fever is gone (without them having taken a fever-reducing medicine). A fever is defined as 100°F or 37.8°C.