



## Frequently asked questions about Swine Flu (it's not really the Swine Flu!!)

**From the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency**

**What is swine flu?** This virus was originally referred to as “swine flu” because laboratory testing showed that many of the genes in this new virus were very similar to flu viruses that normally occur in pigs in North America. But further study has shown that this new virus is very different from what normally circulates in North American pigs. It has two genes from flu viruses that normally circulate in pigs in Europe and Asia and bird genes and human genes.

### **Are there human infections with H1N1 flu in the U.S.?**

In late March and early April 2009, cases of human infection with H1N1 flu were first reported in Mexico, and then in Southern California and Texas. By June, the H1N1 flu outbreak had been declared a global pandemic with more than 182,000 cases and nearly 1,800 deaths world-wide.

### **Is this H1N1 flu virus contagious?**

CDC has determined that this H1N1 flu virus is contagious and spreads easily from human to human.

### **What are the signs and symptoms of H1N1 flu?**

The symptoms of H1N1 flu in people are very similar to the symptoms of regular seasonal flu and include fever (>100°), cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people have reported diarrhea and vomiting associated with H1N1 Flu. Like seasonal flu, H1N1 flu may cause a worsening of existing chronic medical conditions like diabetes or heart disease.

### **How does H1N1 flu spread?**

**Spread of the H1N1 flu virus is happening in the same way that seasonal flu spreads.** Flu viruses are spread mainly from person to person through coughing or sneezing. Sometimes people may become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth, nose or eyes. This is why frequent hand washing is stressed so often when talking about the spread of the flu.

### **How can someone with the flu infect someone else?**

Infected people may be able to infect others beginning 1 day before symptoms develop and up to 7 or more days after becoming sick. **That means that you may be able to pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick.**

### **What should I do to keep from getting the flu?**

First and most important: wash your hands. Get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids, and eat nutritious food. Try not touch surfaces that may be contaminated with the flu virus. Avoid close contact with people who are sick.

### **Are there medicines to treat H1N1 flu?**

Yes. CDC recommends the use of oseltamivir (brand name Tamiflu) or zanamivir (brand name Relenza) for the treatment and/or prevention of infection with these H1N1 flu viruses. Antiviral drugs are prescription medicines that fight against the flu by keeping flu viruses from reproducing in your body. If you get sick, antiviral drugs can make your illness milder and make you feel better faster. They may also prevent serious flu complications. For treatment, antiviral drugs work best if started soon after getting sick (within 2 days of symptoms). In the fall of 2009 there will be a H1N1 vaccine.

### **What surfaces are most likely to be sources of contamination?**

Germs can be spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose, or mouth. Droplets from a cough or sneeze of an infected person move through the air. Germs can be spread when a person touches respiratory droplets from another person on a surface like a desk and then touches their own eyes, mouth or nose before washing their hands.

### **How long can viruses live outside the body?**

We know that some viruses and bacteria can live 2 hours or as long as 8 hours on surfaces like cafeteria tables, doorknobs, desks, computer keyboards, elevator buttons and food trays. Frequent hand washing and cleaning will help you reduce the chance of getting contamination from these common surfaces.

### **What can I do to protect myself from getting sick?**

Vaccines are currently under development and will be available this fall. However, if you are unable to get a vaccine, there are still actions that can help prevent the spread of germs that cause respiratory illnesses like influenza. Take these steps to protect your health:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- If you get sick with influenza, CDC recommends that you stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.

**What should I do if I get sick?** If you live in areas where H1N1 flu cases have been identified and you become ill with influenza-like symptoms, you may want to contact your health care provider, particularly if you are worried about your symptoms. Your health care provider will determine whether testing or treatment is needed. If you are sick, you should stay home and avoid contact with other people as much as possible to keep from spreading your illness to others.

### **How serious is H1N1 flu infection?**

During the current outbreak, more than 343,000 (Oct. 2009) with more than 4100 deaths have been reported worldwide. The first 'wave' of these infections has proven to be mild in comparison to other pandemics, however, the second wave of an illness such as this is often much more severe. Either way, we need to be ready and armed with the facts as well as strategies to avoid getting sick. We also need to know what to do should we get sick. Communicable diseases can be very serious, but how we respond to them can make all the difference in the world. Let's not panic, let's be ready.

### **Can I get H1N1 flu from eating or preparing pork?**

**No.** H1N1 flu viruses are not spread by food. You cannot get H1N1 flu from eating pork or pork products. Eating properly handled and cooked pork products is safe.

**For more information, visit us on the web at**

[www.bhsj.org](http://www.bhsj.org)

**Or contact us at any of our 3 office locations at:**

**Coldwater**  
**517-279-9561 x 143**

**Hillsdale**  
**517-437-7395 x 110**

**Three Rivers**  
**269-273-2161 x 241**

Revised 10/5/09