



Swine Flu- 2009 Influenza A (H1N1) Seasonal Flu

Frequently Asked Questions - For Parents

What is swine flu and how is it different from the regular flu?

The flu (or influenza) 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. The swine flu (also called novel H1N1 influenza) is a new and different influenza virus that is spreading worldwide since April 2009. Just like regular flu, it is spread from person to person, usually through respiratory droplets from coughing or sneezing, or from contact with objects or surfaces with flu viruses on it.

What are the symptoms of swine flu?

Symptoms of swine flu are like regular flu symptoms and include high fevers, cough, sore throat, runny nose, body aches, headache, chills, fatigue, decreased appetite, vomiting and diarrhea. Patients with swine flu usually have at least two of these symptoms, but all of these symptoms can also be caused by other conditions. Most children with nasal symptoms and cough without fever likely just have a cold.

How bad is swine flu and what can we expect this winter?

Overall, despite the media coverage, H1N1 flu is felt to be causing no more severe illness than the regular seasonal flu. This fall and early winter, we did see many cases of swine flu. While the number of cases is down now, we may still see the number of cases rise in the next few weeks. We expect to see regular seasonal flu starting this winter and extending into the spring as in past years.

What should parents do to protect their children from swine or regular flu?

Encourage frequent hand-washing. Avoid large crowds. Avoid direct contact with sick individuals. Parents do not need to take their healthy children out of school or daycare unless it has been recommended by public health authorities.

What should a parent do with a child who has symptoms of swine or regular flu?

Keep the child at home and avoid contact with others, including attending school, until the fever has gone away for a minimum of 24 hours. Encourage children to cover their nose and mouth when they cough or sneeze, either with a tissue or by coughing or sneezing into their elbows. Fever can be treated with acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil). Cough and cold medications should be avoided in children under 4 years of age. Make sure your child gets enough rest and encourage the child to drink plenty of fluids.

When should I take my child in to see the doctor?

Most children can be cared for at home and do not need to be seen in the doctor's office. Children with high risk or chronic medical conditions, such as asthma or diabetes, should be seen in the office at the onset of flu symptoms. All infants less than 3 months with a fever also should be seen by the doctor. Other reasons to take your child to the doctor would include: fast or labored breathing, bluish or gray skin color, lethargy, extreme irritability, severe or persistent vomiting, or lack of urination for over 8 hours.

Are there tests that can determine if my child has swine flu?

There are rapid tests that can identify if your child has the flu, but these tests are not able to tell the difference between swine flu and regular flu. These tests do not pick up all cases and are mainly being considered for very young, very ill, or medically high risk patients when the use of antiviral medications would also be considered. Currently, specific lab testing for swine flu is only being performed in hospitalized patients.

Is there a treatment for swine and regular flu?

Yes, swine flu can be treated with antiviral medications, such as Tamiflu, which can shorten the course of the disease if started within 48 hours of the onset of symptoms. These drugs, however, can have side effects. Not everyone with swine flu needs these drugs to recover. Most children who come down with swine flu will recover fully without antiviral medication. Just like during the regular flu season, doctors are reserving treatment of swine flu for those who have severe disease that may require hospitalization and those who are at risk for having severe complications of swine flu, such as infants and toddlers, and those with asthma, heart disease, immune problems, diabetes and other chronic health conditions. Additionally, doctors are not using antiviral medications for healthy people exposed to someone with swine flu in order to prevent infection.

Is there a vaccine to protect my child from swine flu and do our doctors recommend it?

A vaccine for swine flu has been developed and our doctors recommend this just as we recommend the regular or seasonal flu vaccine. This vaccine comes in two forms: one is given intranasally and the other by shot.

What age groups can be given swine and regular flu vaccine?

Ages 6 months and up may be given the vaccine. Children 6 months to 2 years may only receive the shot/injection. The nasal vaccine or mist is only for children ages 2 and over with no significant health problems such as asthma, lung disease, heart disease and diabetes. All other children must receive the Swine Flu shot.

Which children must NOT receive the swine or regular flu vaccine?

Children with egg allergy may not receive ANY type of flu vaccine – regular/seasonal OR Swine Flu vaccine.

Do CPCMG offices currently have the swine and regular flu vaccine?

Our offices do currently have both swine and regular flu vaccine for children 6 months and above. We have the injectable forms of these vaccines currently rather than the intranasal forms.

Should my child get the regular flu vaccine this year and will it help prevent swine flu?

Yes, all children greater than 6 months of age are recommended to get the regular flu vaccine, as in past years. Unfortunately, the regular flu vaccine does not provide any protection from the virus causing swine flu; that is why the swine flu vaccine has been developed. Conversely, the vaccine for swine flu will not provide protection against the regular seasonal flu, so both vaccines will be necessary for full protection against both viruses this winter. However, if your office says they don't have regular flu vaccine now please keep in mind that primarily swine flu disease is being seen right now, so that your children won't be "too late" if they receive regular flu vaccine in November or December or even later. We will do the best we can to keep you posted about our supplies of regular flu vaccine over these next days and weeks.

Can my child receive the two types of flu vaccine at the same time?

Nasal swine flu vaccine **may** be administered with the regular flu SHOT at the same time, but it **cannot** be given at the same time as REGULAR nasal flu vaccine. Luckily, a child given a nasal vaccine of one type must only wait two weeks before being given a nasal vaccine of the other type. Once we receive the shot form of H1N1 flu vaccine, a child may receive both types of injectable flu vaccine at the same time.

Additional information and resources:

<http://www.aap.org/advocacy/releases/swineflu.htm>

<http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/vaccination/vaccinekeyfacts.htm>

<http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/vaccination/public/vaccinationqapub.htm>

<http://www.sdcounty.ca.gov/Portal/flu/H1N1vaccine.html>