

H1N1 AND THE 2009 FLU SEASON

10 THINGS YOU CAN DO TO PROTECT YOURSELF AND OTHERS

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that flu activity is increasing across the country. About 99 percent of the cases identified as of September 19 have been the 2009 H1N1 influenza A strain, also called swine flu. The illness has been mild for most people, the CDC says. Still, it's wise to protect yourself from flu. Here are 10 tips that will help.

1. **Recognize flu symptoms:** They include fever, headache, muscle aches, chills, fatigue, dry cough, runny nose (more common in children than in adults) and stomach problems such as nausea. You don't have to have all of these symptoms. Any combination is reason to suspect the flu.
2. **If you think you have the flu, see your doctor:** The first signs of flu are not reason to rush to the hospital. A doctor can make a diagnosis and prescribe medication that's effective.
3. **Avoid close contact with others:** Guard against coming into close contact with people who are sick; stay away from others if you're feeling sick.
4. **If you're sick, stay home:** You don't do your employer or coworkers any favors by going into work and putting others at risk. Be even more careful with your child. If you suspect the flu, school is out.
5. **Don't travel if you're sick:** A relatively small enclosed space where people are packed close together – such as on a plane, train or bus – is a perfect environment for spreading flu. If you're ill, stay put.
6. **Cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing:** Not only is it good manners, it helps prevent spreading your illness to people around you.
7. **Keep your hands clean:** Frequent hand washing is effective against germs. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers also work.
8. **Try not to touch your eyes, nose or mouth:** Touching something that's contaminated and then touching your eyes, nose, or mouth can spread flu.
9. **Keep yourself, and your immune system, strong:** Get plenty of sleep, exercise, avoid stress, drink plenty of fluids and follow a healthy diet.

10. **Get flu shots:** The CDC expects the U.S. to have adequate flu vaccine for seasonal flu as well as H1N1. Full protection requires both shots. Groups specifically advised to get H1N1 vaccine include pregnant women, people in frequent contact with children under six months old, healthcare and emergency personnel, people from six months to 24 years old and people aged 25 to 64 with compromised immune systems or other chronic medical conditions that put them at higher risk. You can find more information on flu vaccine recommendations on the CDC's website, www.cdc.gov.

If you're a parent trying to answer your child's questions about H1N1 flu, keep in mind that the panic that surrounded last year's outbreak may still be a fresh memory for the child. Speak in age-appropriate language that doesn't frighten unnecessarily. Explain that most people are not getting sick, and that most people who get sick get better. Emphasize that there are things they can do to protect themselves, such as frequent hand washing and not sharing food or drinks with classmates.

This article is for informational and self-help purposes only. It should not be treated as a substitute for financial, medical, psychiatric, psychological or behavioral healthcare advice, or as a substitute for consultation with a qualified professional.

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