



H1N1 Influenza

As you are likely aware from recent media coverage, federal and state efforts to develop and revise plans for dealing with an expected pandemic of H1N1 this fall are ongoing. Los Olivos Women relies on CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) protocols for screening and treatment of possible H1N1 cases.

What is H1N1 and how is it different from regular seasonal flu?

H1N1 is a new strain of the influenza virus with similar symptoms and behavior to the seasonal flu that infects people every year. As it is a new virus, humans have no natural immunity to it, so we expect a large number of people will be infected this fall. Like most other states, H1N1 is prevalent in California and patients with flu-like symptoms are presumed to have the H1N1 virus. At this time, the virus has behaved similarly to the seasonal flu with the vast majority of patients recovering without any problems.

What are the symptoms of H1N1?

The symptoms are virtually identical to seasonal flu and consist most commonly of sudden onset of fever, body aches, dry cough and sore throat. It is different from a "stomach bug" which usually consists of nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea and from the common cold, which is usually milder and does not come on as quickly.

How does H1N1 spread?

Like seasonal flu, H1N1 spreads mostly from droplets (like spit and mucous) from the mouth, nose, and throat. This happens when a person with the flu coughs or sneezes near (within 3-6 feet) an uninfected person. The virus can also live a few hours on surfaces so you can become infected by touching something like a doorknob or telephone that has been touched by someone with the flu and then touching your mouth, nose, or eyes. This is why frequent hand washing or use of an alcohol-based hand gel (like Purell) is so important.

How can I stay healthy?

Practice good hygiene

- ◆ Wash hands often with warm water and soap or use an alcohol-based hand gel frequently, especially after you cough or sneeze.
- ◆ Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it. If tissue is not available, cough into your sleeve/elbow.
- ◆ Avoid touching your mouth, nose, or eyes at anytime, but especially when you are sick as this is a common way H1N1 can spread.
- ◆ Individuals who are sick with flu symptoms should stay home from school or work and, to the extent possible, limit contact with others, except to seek medical care, for at least 24 hours after they no longer have a fever, or signs of a fever, without the use of fever-reducing medicines.

Get the regular seasonal flu vaccine

Although the regular seasonal flu vaccine does *not* protect against H1N1, we strongly all patients to get the vaccine this year.

What about the H1N1 vaccine?

It is expected that a limited number of H1N1 vaccines will become available this fall. Distribution of this vaccine will be highly regulated by the CDC. It is recommended that all pregnant women receive the H1N1 vaccine. The vaccine should be available mid-October.

What symptoms do I look for?

Most people who get the flu will have a sudden onset of fever, dry cough, body aches, sore throat, headache and extreme fatigue. If you have a fever of 100 or greater and/or a cough or sore throat, then you meet the definition of likely having the H1N1 virus. As mandated by the CDC, we will not be testing for H1N1 (like medical offices everywhere). As there is so much H1N1 in the country, we are advised to presume you have it and treat you accordingly.

What do I do if I am sick?

1. Stay home. Patients who are pregnant should call Los Olivos for advice. Patients with chronic medical conditions (asthma, diabetes, heart disease, immunocompromised) should contact their primary care doctor. If you are in one of these high-risk groups, it is advised that you be treated with an antiviral medication as soon as possible after the onset of symptoms. Treatment benefits outweigh any theoretical risks of antiviral use according to the CDC. The Emergency Room is not culturing for H1N1 other than for epidemiologic reasons in hospitalized patients. Go to the emergency room if you are having difficulty breathing or shortness of breath. Other emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include: pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen, sudden dizziness, confusion, severe or persistent vomiting or flu-like symptoms that improve but then return with fever and worse cough.

2. Limit contact with others

- ◆ Stay home to keep from making others sick until you have no fever for 24 hours (without fever reducing medications, such as acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil).
- ◆ Do not allow visitors and wear a mask as much as possible and especially if others enter your room.
- ◆ Cover your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing.
- ◆ Stay in a separate bedroom.
- ◆ If using a common bathroom, wear a mask as much as possible while in the bathroom and wash hands or use an alcohol-based hand gel on entering and leaving the bathroom.
- ◆ Do not share eating utensils or drinks.
- ◆ Enlist a friend or family member to help with bringing you meals.
- ◆ Remain in your room until you have no fever without fever reducer (acetaminophen or ibuprofen) for 24 hours. Acetaminophen is preferred if you are pregnant.
- ◆ The influenza virus survives on environmental surfaces (such as door knobs and books) 2-8 hours after being deposited. It is destroyed by heat, chlorine, soap and alcohols if used in proper concentration for a sufficient length of time.

3. Treat your symptoms

- ◆ *Fever:* Fever is the most common symptom of the flu. To treat your fever, keep your room as cool as possible, wear light weight clothing, drink plenty of fluids, such as water, diluted fruit juices or PowerAde, and take acetaminophen or ibuprofen per label instructions. Do not take aspirin.
- ◆ *Cough:* a dry cough is a cough that does not bring up much mucous. Drink lots of clear liquids; avoid alcohol, caffeine, and cigarettes. Rest, soothe your throat with salt-water gargles (• teaspoon salt in 8 ounces of warm water) or cough lozenges.
- ◆ *Body aches/headaches:* Acetaminophen or ibuprofen will also help relieve body aches and/or headaches. Follow label directions.
- ◆ *Avoid dehydration:* To prevent this, drink plenty of fluids. Suggestions include water, broth, diluted fruit juices or PowerAde, vegetable juices, decaffeinated tea, hot water with honey and lemon, Jell-O or

popsicles.

4. Take flu antiviral drugs if recommended.

- ◆ If you get seasonal or novel H1N1 flu, antiviral drugs can treat the flu.
- ◆ Antiviral drugs are prescription medicines (pills, liquid or an inhaled powder) that fight against the flu by keeping flu viruses from reproducing in your body.
- ◆ Antiviral drugs can make your illness milder and make you feel better faster. They may also prevent serious flu complications.
- ◆ Antiviral drugs are not sold over-the-counter and are different from antibiotics.
- ◆ Antiviral drugs may be especially important for people who are very sick (hospitalized) or people who are sick with the flu and who are at increased risk of serious flu complications, such as pregnant women, young children and those with chronic health conditions.
- ◆ For treatment, antiviral drugs work best if started within the first 2 days of symptoms.
- ◆ Oseltamivir (Tamiflu) is the drug of choice for pregnant women. If exposed to H1N1, Tamiflu is taken 75 mg/day for 10 days. If treating a suspected flu, Tamiflu is prescribed 75 mg twice daily for 5 days.

What do I do if I am living with a sick person?

- ◆ Contact your primary physician immediately if you are pregnant, have significant asthma or respiratory illness, significant chronic cardiovascular, liver, blood, neurologic disease or diabetes, HIV, or are taking immunosuppressive drugs.
- ◆ Limit face-to-face contact as much as possible. Consider moving somewhere else until your family is well.
- ◆ Wash your hands frequently with soap and water or alcohol-based hand gel, especially after handling used tissues or laundry.
- ◆ Monitor yourself for flu symptoms and contact your physician if you develop a fever and cough or sore throat or if you have any concerns.

How do I get more information on H1N1?

For other sources of information, you can go to

www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu

www.health.ri.gov/pandemicflu/swineflu/swineflu.php

www.flu.gov or 800-CDC-INFO

www.consumerreportshealth.org/swineflu