

Novel H1N1 Influenza Update for Seniors

August 2009

Q: *What is the current status of novel Influenza A (H1N1)?*

A: During the summer, the novel (A) H1N1 flu continued its spread across the U.S., affecting over an estimated one million Americans. This level of flu activity was higher than what we expect for this time of year. Most of the cases have been among persons 5 to 24 years old.

Q: *What makes the upcoming flu season different?*

A: This fall and winter we expect both the seasonal flu and novel H1N1 flu to be circulating, so more people could be getting sick. So far, adults older than 64 years have been less affected than younger age groups by the novel H1N1 flu. On the other hand, people ages 65 and older are still at greater risk for complications from the yearly seasonal flu.

Q: *Who is at increased risk of complications from the novel H1N1 virus?*

A: Pregnant women, children younger than 5 years old, persons who have chronic medical conditions and/or have compromised immune systems have an increased risk of complications from the novel H1N1 virus. However, people older than 65 years have been less affected thus far.

Q: *What about a flu vaccine?*

A: The best way to protect against the flu is to be vaccinated each year. This year the CDC recommends two vaccines: one against the seasonal flu and the other to protect persons from the novel H1N1 flu. There are two separate vaccines.

Q: *Should I get the seasonal flu vaccine?*

A: The CDC recommends that everyone 6 months and older should get the yearly flu vaccine against seasonal flu. People ages 65 and older, pregnant women, children aged 6 months to 5 years, and those with underlying medical conditions are especially recommended to get the seasonal flu vaccine as soon as it becomes available early this fall.

Q: *What about a vaccine to protect against novel H1N1 flu?*

A: The CDC recommends that initial vaccination efforts against the novel H1N1 flu target five key groups when it becomes available:

- Pregnant women
- People who live with or care for children younger than 6 months of age
- Healthcare and emergency medical services personnel
- Children and young adults aged 6 months to 24 years
- People aged 25 to 64 years with underlying medical conditions (e.g. asthma, diabetes)

As vaccine supply increases and demand among younger age groups is met, the CDC recommends that other adults receive the novel H1N1 vaccine.

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(continued)

Q: *What are symptoms for the novel H1N1 flu?*

A: The symptoms are similar to the seasonal flu: fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills, and fatigue. Some people also report vomiting and/or diarrhea.

Q: *What should I do if I have flu symptoms?*

- A:
- **Call the doctor.** He/she may prescribe antiviral medicines if you are at risk of complications.
 - **Stay at home** until at least 24 hours after being free of fever (100° F) or having signs of a fever without the use of fever-reducing medications.
 - **Get plenty of rest.**
 - **Drink clear fluids**, such as water, broth or sports drinks to keep from becoming dehydrated.
 - **Limit contact with others** as much as possible.

Q: *When should I seek urgent medical attention for the flu?*

A: See a doctor or go to the emergency department right away if you develop any of the following symptoms:

- Difficulty breathing
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Flu-like symptoms that improve but then return with fever and worse cough

Q: *What can I do to prevent the spread of flu and its complications?*

A: Basic hygiene can help stop the spread of both seasonal flu *and* novel H1N1 flu:

- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw your used tissues in the trash can.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after coughing or sneezing. Use hand sanitizer if you cannot wash your hands.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread that way.
- Get your flu vaccine – for seasonal flu and for novel H1N1 flu.
- Get a pneumococcal disease vaccine if you are 65 years of age or older. It is also recommended for persons 2 to 64 years old with high risk medical conditions, persons 19-64 years old who smoke and/or have asthma, and all children less than 5 years old.

Q: *Where can I get more information?*

- A:
- For the most current information, check out the CDC website: www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu.
 - Ask H1N1 flu questions on-line at the Virginia Department of Health website: www.vdh.virginia.gov or call its toll free H1N1 hotline, Mondays through Fridays, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at **1-877-ASK-VDH3** (1-877-275-8343).

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