

***2009 H1N1 Influenza***  
**Frequently Asked Questions**  
***Wisconsin Division of Public Health***  
*Current as of September 22, 2009*

**Why are health officials so concerned?**

- The threat from this new flu virus has resurged. The 2009 H1N1 influenza virus is making front page news again.
- The virus is still circulating and making people sick – in Wisconsin, across the nation and worldwide.
- In the United States, resumption of school and classes has sparked new concerns. At the University of Wisconsin-Madison, 345 students with influenza-like illness have been evaluated. News reports are circulating about the effect of the 2009 H1N1 virus on college football teams.
- In Wisconsin and throughout the United States, virtually all of the flu occurring right now is being caused by the 2009 H1N1 virus.

**What will happen this Fall?**

- Most scientists currently expect to see a “second wave” of illness in the fall caused by the 2009 H1N1 virus, and there is strong evidence for this currently in the United States.
- Even if the 2009 H1N1 virus does NOT develop the ability to cause more severe illness, it is still dangerous:
  - Influenza is always a potentially serious, life-threatening illness – especially for people at high risk of complications. Nationwide, it kills or contributes to the deaths of an estimated 36,000 people annually, making it one of our leading causes of death, year in and year out.
  - Because the 2009 H1N1 virus is a completely new virus – one that has never circulated before – it is less likely that people will have any immunity to it.
  - A 2009 H1N1 virus vaccine is expected to be available by mid-October. When the vaccine becomes available, there probably won't be enough for everybody at first.
- As the fall season progresses, we could face an influenza threat of historic proportions – with circulation of the 2009 H1N1 virus and up to three additional strains of seasonal influenza viruses that can make people sick.
- If we need to cope with widespread illness caused by the 2009 H1N1 virus and seasonal flu in the fall, our health care system could be overwhelmed.

**Who is most likely to become ill with the H1N1 Flu?**

- Virtually everyone who did not develop an infection with the 2009 H1N1 virus in the spring or summer is susceptible to this virus and is at risk of becoming ill. The groups at highest risk of serious illness include:
  - Pregnant women.

- Severe illness and death has occurred in pregnant women. Compared to the general population, a greater proportion of pregnant women infected with the 2009 H1N1 influenza virus have been hospitalized.
  - In addition, six percent of confirmed fatal 2009 H1N1 flu cases thus far have been in pregnant women while only about 1 percent of the general population is pregnant.
- Children, adolescents and young adults aged 6 months to 24 years appear to be at increased risk for serious illness.
  - CDC reports the hospitalization rate per 100,000 people was highest among children in the 0 to 4 years of age group at **6.1** children per 100,000.
  - The next highest reported hospitalization rates were in the 5 to 24 years of age group, which had a hospitalization rate of **2.9** per 100,000 people.
- Health care and emergency services personnel.
- People who live with or care for children under the age of six months.
- People aged 25 to 64 who are at risk of complications because of an underlying medical or immune system condition.
- However, H1N1's impact could change in the fall.
  - The groups most at risk of serious illness could change.
  - The virus could develop resistance to antiviral drugs.
  - The virus could change in ways that would make a vaccine less effective.
  - We do not know if the virus will develop the ability to cause more severe illness.
  - We need to hope for the best – but prepare for the worst.

## **How do I protect myself against flu?**

- Obtain the seasonal (“regular”) influenza vaccine soon.
- Obtain the 2009 H1N1 influenza vaccine when it becomes available.
- Identify those in your household who are:
  - early targets for the new H1N1 vaccine
  - at higher risk for serious influenza complications
- Monitor local media for up-to-date information and :
  - Dial “211” for questions
  - Watch Pandemic.Wisconsin.Gov on the web
  - Call your Local Health Department
- Make a household plan for illness or other possible emergencies
- Take a few simple, common-sense precautions.
  - Cover your nose and mouth with your sleeve or a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Dispose of tissue properly.
  - Clean your hands frequently and thoroughly – with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand-sanitizer solution.
  - Limit your contact with others who may be ill.
  - Clean your hands after shaking hands or having other close contact with others and before eating or preparing food, or touching your eyes, nose or mouth.
- Be aware of the symptoms of 2009 H1N1 influenza, which are similar to those for seasonal flu:
  - fever
  - cough
  - sore throat

- runny or stuffy nose
- body aches
- headache
- chills
- fatigue
- In some cases, symptoms of 2009 H1N1 can also include vomiting and diarrhea – which are not typically symptoms of seasonal flu.

### **What should I do if I catch the Flu?**

- Stay home from work or school – and generally avoid going out in public – if you are sick with symptoms of the flu. **CDC now recommends that people with influenza-like illness remain at home until at least 24 hours after they are free of fever (100° F [37.8°C]), or signs of a fever without the use of fever-reducing medications.**
- If you are an employer, encourage your employees to stay home if they are sick with flu symptoms.
- “Call before you go” to clinic or hospital, except for life-threatening symptoms Call first to see if you need to actually see your provider in person. If you do need to see your provider, steps can be taken to avoid exposing other patients to the flu.

### **What medicines work against the 2009 H1N1 virus?**

- The class of antiviral drugs that includes Tamiflu and Relenza currently appears to be effective in treating 2009 H1N1 flu.
- A physician prescribes these drugs.
- Antiviral drugs are normally made available through the private sector health care system.
- If shortages of these drugs occur in the private sector health care, state and federal stockpiles have antivirals for **slightly more than one million courses of treatment** available for use in Wisconsin.

### **Where’s the anti-H1N1 vaccine?**

The Food and Drug Administration has approved a 2009 H1N1 influenza vaccine. This paves the way for vaccine production. The first limited supplies are expected to arrive early in October.

- The bulk of vaccine will start arriving by mid-October.
- The federal government has ordered 195 million doses of H1N1 vaccine. In a typical year, 100 million doses of seasonal flu vaccine are administered.
- Because early vaccine shipments to Wisconsin will be limited in early October, the vaccine will be administered first to individuals in the CDC’s target groups:
  - Pregnant women
  - Household contacts and caregivers for children less than 6 months old
  - Healthcare and emergency medical services personnel
  - All people age 6 months through 24 years
  - Persons age 25 through 64 years who have conditions associated with higher risk of complications from influenza

- The use of target populations allows public health the ability to reduce the spread of disease and protect those most vulnerable.

## **Will one shot work for both types of flu?**

- The seasonal influenza vaccine will *not* protect against 2009 H1N1 influenza.
- The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has approved the use of one dose of 2009 H1N1 flu vaccine for persons 10 years of age and older.
  - Data from trials among children are not available at this time, so dosing schedules for children are not yet known.
  - Data from trials among children will be available soon.
- At this time, FDA has approved two doses for children 9 years of age and younger. As with seasonal vaccine, children ages 6 months through 35 months get two doses of 2009 H1N1 flu vaccine that contains one-half the dose used for older children and adults.
- Since as many as four different flu strains may be making people sick this fall, it is more important than ever this year to get vaccinated against “seasonal” flu.
- Since the seasonal vaccine will be available before the 2009 H1N1 vaccine, you should go ahead and get a seasonal flu shot as soon as it is available to you – and if you are in a high-risk group for severe illness, it is especially important to get your 2009 H1N1 vaccination as soon as it is available to you.
- Initial shipments of the seasonal vaccine are already arriving in Wisconsin. Check with your health care provider and be alert for announcements about special flu shot clinics so that you can get vaccinated.