How to Protect against 2009 H1N1 Flu

If you have ever had the flu, you know it can knock you out—with members of your family, friends, and co-workers not far behind. This season, flu may pack more of a punch than usual because of the new 2009 H1N1 flu virus (sometimes called “swine flu”). Many people will not have immunity to this new virus and there could be more people sick, hospitalized and dying from flu-related illness this season than during a regular flu season. For this reason, it’s more important than ever to get your facts straight about flu—and the vaccines available to prevent flu.

2009 H1N1 is likely to be the most common flu virus this season. A separate vaccine has been made to protect against 2009 H1N1 flu since this new virus was detected after production of the seasonal flu vaccine had already begun. The H1N1 flu vaccine is produced in the same way as seasonal flu vaccine. CDC has recommendations on who should get vaccinated with each vaccine this season. Ask your doctor about flu vaccination.

“People who do not get vaccinated are taking two risks: they are placing themselves at risk for the flu, including a potentially long and serious illness, and second, if they get sick, they are also placing their close contacts at risk for influenza,” says Dr. Anne Schuchat, Assistant Surgeon General of the U.S. Public Health Service and CDC’s Director of the National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases. “Flu can be especially serious for babies, young children, pregnant women, and people with certain chronic medical conditions, and seniors, who are at high risk of flu-related complications or death. Influenza is not a disease to be taken lightly.”

While adults only need one dose of 2009 H1N1 vaccine, children 9 years of age and younger will need two doses approximately one month apart of the 2009 H1N1 flu vaccine to be fully protected.

You can get vaccinated with either a flu shot (for people six months and older) or a nasal spray vaccine (for healthy people 2 years through 49 years of age who are not pregnant). The nasal spray vaccine is a good option for those who may have a fear of needles. Flu vaccines are very safe and closely monitored for any potential side effects.

It’s important to realize that influenza vaccine cannot give you the flu. Why? Because the injected flu shot contains inactivated (killed) viruses, and the nasal spray contains attenuated (weakened) viruses and cannot cause flu illness. If you get the flu soon after getting the flu vaccine, it means that you may have been exposed to the virus shortly before getting vaccinated or during the two-week period it takes the body to gain protection after getting vaccinated, or you are sick with a non-flu respiratory virus that has similar symptoms of the flu.
Both 2009 H1N1 flu and seasonal flu viruses are thought to spread mostly from person to person through the coughs and sneezes of people who are sick with flu. You can also get sick by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching your eyes, mouth or nose. Make sure to cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, and wash your hands often with soap and water. It’s also smart to avoid close contact with people who are sick.

For people who are very sick from flu and are hospitalized or people who are sick with flu symptoms and are at increased risk for serious flu complications, antiviral drugs are available and can help make illness milder and shorten the time sick. For treatment, antiviral drugs work best if started within the first 2 days of symptoms.

So fight the flu by following CDC recommended three-step approach: vaccination; everyday preventive actions and the correct use of antiviral drugs.

For more information, visit [www.flu.gov](http://www.flu.gov) or contact your local health department at (252) 338-4400 or provider.