

Seasonal Influenza and 2009 H1N1 Influenza Frequently Asked Questions

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Shaded area indicates information added since October 9, 2009.

What is the difference between a cold and influenza (flu)?

- Both are respiratory illnesses but they are caused by different viruses.
- Because these two types of illnesses have similar flu-like symptoms, it can be difficult to tell the difference between them.
- In general, the flu is worse than the common cold, and symptoms such as fever, body aches, extreme tiredness, and dry cough are more common and intense.
- Colds are usually milder than the flu.
- People with colds are more likely to have a runny or stuffy nose.
- Colds generally do not result in serious health problems, such as pneumonia, bacterial infections, or hospitalizations.

What is flu?

- An infection of the nose, throat, and lungs caused by influenza viruses.
- There are many different flu viruses and sometimes a completely new virus emerges.
- The seasonal flu is caused by flu viruses that are slightly different than the viruses seen in the past year (the 2009-10 seasonal flu vaccine was made to protect against viruses similar to those seen toward the end of last flu season **before** the 2009 H1N1 flu emerged).

Is 2009 H1N1 flu the same as influenza A?

- Yes, 2009 H1N1 flu is a respiratory (breathing tract) disease caused by type A influenza (flu) virus.
- There are three types of influenza viruses: A, B and C.
- Influenza A and B viruses cause seasonal epidemics of disease almost every winter in the United States.
- Influenza type C infections cause a mild respiratory illness and are not thought to cause epidemics. The flu vaccine does not protect from the mild influenza C virus.
- Influenza A viruses are divided into subtypes. Influenza B does not have subtypes.
- The seasonal vaccine protects from 2 subtypes of influenza A and also protects from getting influenza B.
- Getting a flu vaccine can protect against influenza A and B viruses expected to circulate this flu season. This year's seasonal flu vaccine was developed before 2009 H1N1 flu emerged.

What is 2009 H1N1 flu?

- It is a new and different flu virus. It was identified after development of the seasonal flu vaccine for 2009-2010, thus protection for this type of Influenza A was not included in the seasonal flu vaccine.
- It was called the swine flu at first because it has pieces of flu virus that were found in pigs in the past.
- The 2009 H1N1 flu is contagious and spreading from human-to-human.
- The 2009 H1N1 flu has caused illness, hospital stays, and deaths in the United States.

What is a main difference between the characteristics of seasonal and 2009 H1N1 flu?

- The 2009 H1N1 flu is causing infections and deaths in younger people.
- Seasonal flu usually does not cause severe illness in healthy children and young adults.
- Seasonal flu causes more severe illness in persons 65 years old and greater. Ninety percent (90%) of seasonal flu deaths are in the elderly and elderly account for a lower percentage of the H1N1 deaths.

Do we expect to see both the seasonal and the 2009 H1N1 flu this season?

- Yes.
- The 2009 H1N1 flu has been the predominate type of flu circulating during the early 2009-2010 flu season.

What are the clinical symptoms of flu (both seasonal and 2009 H1N1)?

Symptoms usually appear 2-7 days after exposure and may include:

- Fever (100 degrees or greater)*
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Body aches
- Headaches
- Chills
- Fatigue
- Occasional diarrhea and vomiting associated with the 2009 H1N1 flu
- Flu can cause a worsening of chronic medical conditions, such as HIV infection, chronic lung, heart, liver, and kidney problems.
- Infants may have fever and extreme tiredness but may not have a cough.

*Note: Some people with flu will not have a fever.

Since the symptoms of this flu are similar to seasonal flu, how do I know if I have 2009 H1N1 flu?

- The only way to know is by testing a sample of your nose and throat secretions.
- Many doctors can test for influenza A. Unfortunately, the rapid tests (done in 15 minutes in a doctor's office) are not perfect. Your doctor may suspect flu and treat with antiviral medication even if the test is negative.
- Specific lab tests for 2009 H1N1 flu can only be done by special laboratories and is no longer being done routinely.
- Since Marion County is known to have circulating 2009 H1N1 flu, your doctor may treat your symptoms without testing.

How is it determined whether seasonal flu or H1N1 is circulating in Indiana?

- Some doctors work with the Indiana State Department of Health (ISDH) and send nose and throat secretion samples to ISDH for testing.
- These test results determine the type(s) of flu we are seeing.

How do you catch flu (seasonal and 2009 H1N1 flu)?

- Human-to-human spread occurs when infected people cough and sneeze and their respiratory droplets reach another person.
- These droplets seldom go more than 3 feet. Experts say that 3 to 6 feet away is a reasonably safe distance.
- Touching surfaces, such as a table or doorknob, that are contaminated with the virus and then touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.

How long can infected persons spread flu to others?

- Up to one day before symptoms
- While having symptoms
- Possibly up to 7 days after onset of symptoms
- The most infectious period is while feverish and for 24 hours after the fever is gone without the use of fever-reducing medication.
- Children and people with weakened immune systems may be contagious longer

How long does this virus live on surfaces, like a table or door knob?

Two to eight hours.

Should I get a pneumonia shot?

- It is recommended that persons **65 years** and older who **have not had a pneumonia vaccine**, consider receiving the vaccine. It is also recommended for some people younger than 65 years who have other health conditions.
- This could help prevent you from developing serious complications if you should become infected with influenza.
- Contact your doctor if you have questions. This shot is available at the Marion County Health Department district health offices.

Is there medication for persons ill with flu?

- **It is expected that most people will recover without needing medication.**
- Tamiflu® (oseltamivir) and Relenza® (zanamivir) are effective against the 2009 H1N1 flu.
- There are two other antiviral medication that are effective against the seasonal flu but not effective for 2009 H1N1 flu.
- The medication works best when started within 2 days of symptom onset.
- Antiviral drugs can make illness milder and make the ill person feel better.
- The priority use for these drugs is to treat seriously ill people and those with medical conditions making them at increased risk for flu.
- A doctor's prescription is needed.

Who is at higher risk of serious medical complications (getting very sick) from flu?

These groups are at greater risk for serious medical complications for both seasonal and 2009 H1N1 flu and may need antiviral medication if symptoms develop.

Children younger than 5, but especially children younger than 2 years old

Adults 65 years of age and older

Pregnant women

People who have medical conditions including:

– **Asthma**

– **Neurological and neurodevelopmental conditions** [including disorders of the brain, spinal cord, peripheral nerve, and muscle such as cerebral palsy, epilepsy (seizure disorders), stroke, intellectual disability (mental retardation), moderate to severe developmental delay, muscular dystrophy, or spinal cord injury].

– **Chronic lung disease** (such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease [COPD] and cystic fibrosis)

– **Heart disease** (such as congenital heart disease, congestive heart failure and coronary artery disease)

– **Blood disorders** (such as sickle cell disease)

– **Endocrine disorders** (such as diabetes mellitus)

– **Kidney disorders**

– **Liver disorders**

– **Metabolic disorders** (such as inherited metabolic disorders and mitochondrial disorders)

– **Weakened immune system due to disease or medication** (such as people with HIV or AIDs, or cancer, or those on chronic steroids)

– **People younger than 19 years of age who are receiving long-term aspirin therapy**

If you have flu symptoms and are also in one of the above groups, call the doctor. Your doctor may prescribe medicines that can make your illness milder and make you feel better faster. They may also prevent serious flu complications.

What are side effects of Tamiflu® and Relenza®?

Tamiflu®: Nausea and vomiting.

Relenza®: Relenza® is generally not recommended for use in persons with underlying lung disease such as asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. Other less common side effects: diarrhea, nausea, sinusitis, nasal infections, bronchitis, cough, headache, and dizziness.

Can these medications be given to pregnant women?

- Treatment with Tamiflu® or Relenza® is recommended for symptomatic pregnant women.
- Pregnant women should talk to their doctors if they become symptomatic.
- Acetaminophen (Tylenol®) can be used during pregnancy to reduce fever.

What action can help prevent the spread of the flu?

- Instead of your hands, use your elbow or upper arm or a tissue to cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze.
- Immediately throw used tissues into the wastebasket.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially when you cough or sneeze.
- Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective. Young children must be supervised when using alcohol-based hand cleaners.
- Hand sanitizers that do not contain alcohol may be useful for killing flu virus.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- If you get sick, stay home from work or school and limit contact with others.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth (germs spread this way).
- Avoid shaking hands and hugging.

What do I do if I get sick?

- If you are sick with a flu-like illness, stay home for at least 24 hours after the fever is gone (without the use of fever-reducing medication). A fever is defined as 100 degrees F or higher.
- Call your doctor if you have a severe illness or are at high risk for complications. Your doctor will determine if treatment is needed.
- Avoid contact with others.
- If you leave home to seek medical care, wear a mask or cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue.
- Treat any fever with a medication such as acetaminophen (Tylenol) ® or ibuprofen.
- Drink plenty of fluids.

What symptoms require emergency medical attention?

In children, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish skin color

- Not drinking enough fluids
- Not waking up or not interacting
- Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough
- Fever with a rash

In adults, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting

If a family member is sick, can the well people in the house go to work or school?

- Yes, but they should monitor their health daily.
- All people in the household should take everyday precautions, including washing hands with soap and water often.

Can I get swine influenza from eating or preparing pork?

No. Swine influenza viruses are not spread by food.

What is the best technique for washing my hands to avoid getting the flu?

- Wash with soap and water or alcohol-based cleaners. If these are not available, a hand sanitizer that does not contain alcohol may be used.
- When using soap and water, wash for 20 seconds (sing “Happy Birthday” twice).
- When using alcohol-based cleaners, rub hands until dry.

What should a childcare provider do if children or staff have flu symptoms?

- Sick children and staff should stay at home until at least 24 hours after their fever is gone.
- The fever must be gone without them taking a fever-reducing medication.
- A fever is defined as 100 degrees F or higher.

What are some important tips for taking care of a sick person in your home?

- Do not give aspirin (*or aspirin-containing products, such as Pepto Bismol®*) to children or teenagers (up to 18 years) who have the flu because this can cause a rare but serious illness called Reye’s syndrome.
- Keep the sick person in a separate room with the door closed.
- Sick persons should cover their nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing.
- Sick persons may wear a mask, if available, when in common areas of the house.
- If possible, the sick person should use a separate bathroom.
- Pregnant women should not care for the sick person.
- Only one person in the household should take care of the sick person.
- Caretakers should avoid close contact.
- The sick person should not have visitors.
- All household members should wash their hands often.

- Any used tissues should be thrown out immediately and hands should be washed.
- Wiping down with a household disinfectant cleans surfaces, such as tables and doorknobs.
- Household members should be monitored for flu symptoms.
- Linens and eating utensils should not be shared.
- Wash linen with household laundry detergent and tumble dry on a high setting,
- Avoid “hugging” the laundry prior to washing so you don’t get contaminated.

Can my dog, cat, or other animals get this virus?

- As of November 5, 2009, H1N1 has been confirmed in pigs, ferrets, and cats in the United States. There have not been confirmed cases in dogs, pot bellied pigs, or pet birds but they may occur in the future.
- Flu symptoms in pets are similar to humans: coughing, sneezing, fever, and lack of appetite.
- If you have flu symptoms, protect your pet by washing your hands, covering your coughs and sneezes, and limiting contact with your pet.
- There is not currently an H1N1 vaccine for animals.

What are the most important things I can do to prevent spread?

- Cover your cough or cough into your sleeve.
- Wash your hands often.
- Monitor yourself for fever (100 or greater), cough, and sore throat.
- Stay home from school, work, or other gathering if you are sick with these symptoms.

Can I breastfeed my baby?

- Mothers who are breastfeeding and taking medicine to treat flu because they are sick should express their breast milk for bottle feedings, which can be given to your baby by someone who is not sick.
- If help is not available, consider wearing a face mask while breastfeeding.
- You can take the flu medication and still feed your baby breast milk.

What should people with chronic medical conditions do if they think they may have 2009 H1N1 flu?

Person with chronic medical conditions should contact their health care provider who will determine if treatment is needed.

What should pregnant women do if they think they may have 2009 H1N1 flu?

- If you develop symptoms or have been in close contact with someone who has the flu, contact your doctor as soon as possible.
- Early treatment with anti-viral medication is recommended for pregnant women with flu symptoms.

What household cleaning should be done to prevent the spread of influenza virus?

Keep surfaces (especially bedside tables, surfaces in the bathroom, kitchen counters and toys for children) clean by wiping them down with a household disinfectant according to directions on the product label.

What are schools doing to prevent the spread of flu?

The Centers for Disease Control has provided guidance to schools that includes:

- Encouraging students and staff to stay home when ill
- Emphasizing hand washing and covering coughs
- Routine cleaning of surfaces
- Emphasizing early treatment for flu symptoms for students or staff with high risk medical conditions

Flu Vaccine Questions

Is the seasonal flu vaccine available?

- The Marion County Health Department district health offices have seasonal flu vaccine.
- The seasonal flu vaccine will not protect against the 2009 H1N1 flu.
- Individuals are encouraged to get their seasonal flu vaccine at any time during the flu season.

Who should get the seasonal flu vaccine?

- Anyone who wants to reduce the likelihood of becoming ill with influenza or spreading influenza to others.
- Children ages 6 months up to 19 years old.
- Pregnant women.
- People 50 years of age and older.
- People of any age with certain chronic medical conditions.
- People who live in nursing homes and other long-term care facilities.
- Health care workers.
- Household contacts of persons at high risk for complications from the flu.
- Household contacts and out of home caregivers of children less than 6 months of age (these children are too young to be vaccinated)

Is the 2009 H1N1 flu vaccine available?

The first doses of the 2009 H1N1 flu vaccine became available in October 2009. Additional doses will be made available throughout the influenza season.

What types of flu vaccine will be available?

- Injectable vaccine will be available for both seasonal and 2009 H1N1 flu vaccine (inactivated vaccine).
- Nasal spray (Flu Mist®) will be available for both seasonal and 2009 H1N1 flu vaccine (live attenuated –very weak and not able to cause flu).

Will the vaccine be available with and without a preservative?

- Yes.
- As with the seasonal influenza vaccines, the Influenza A (H1N1) 2009 Monovalent vaccines will be available in formulations that contain thimerosal, a mercury-containing preservative, as well as preservative-free formulations.
- Thimerosal is a safe vaccine preservative.

Does the nasal spray (Flu Mist®) vaccine contain thimerosal?

No.

Can breastfeeding women take the nasal spray (Flu Mist®)?

Yes.

Can pregnant women get vaccine made with thimerosal?

Yes. There is no evidence that thimerosal is harmful to pregnant women or a fetus. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention advises pregnant women to get flu shots either with or without thimerosal.

Is the 2009 H1N1 flu vaccine safe?

- The vaccine is being produced using methods similar to seasonal flu vaccine and is thought to be safe. Neither the injectable or nasal spray vaccine were made by “experimental” methods.
- The safety of this vaccine will be monitored.

Who is recommended to receive the 2009 H1N1 flu vaccine?

The target groups include:

- Pregnant women
- People who live with or care for children younger than 6 months of age
- Healthcare and emergency medical services personnel
- Persons between the ages of 6 months and 24 years old
- People ages of 25 through 64 years of age who are at higher risk for 2009 H1N1 because of chronic health disorders or compromised immune systems.

Once the demand for vaccine for these target groups is met, providers should begin vaccinating everyone from ages 25 through 64 years then people over 65 years old.

Why were healthcare and emergency medical services personnel prioritized for the 2009 H1N1 flu vaccine?

- Infections among healthcare workers have been reported and this can be a potential source of infection for vulnerable patients.
- Increased absenteeism in this population could reduce healthcare system capacity.
- The nasal spray (Flu Mist®) was made available first and is licensed for use in healthy persons who 2-49 years old.

Why should people in the target groups to receive the 2009 H1N1 flu vaccine consider getting the vaccine if they are healthy?

- Studies have shown that the target groups for the 2009 H1N1 vaccine are at the highest risk of infection, hospitalization, and death from the 2009 H1N1 flu.
- Previously healthy people have become seriously ill with the 2009 H1N1 flu.

Should those target groups for 2009 H1N1 flu vaccine also get the seasonal flu vaccine?

- People recommended for both the seasonal and the 2009 H1N1 flu vaccine should receive both vaccines.
- Both seasonal and 2009 H1N1 flu are likely to circulate this flu season.

Why are seniors the lowest priority for 2009 H1N1 vaccine?

Studies indicate the risk of infection, hospitalization, and death from the 2009 H1N1 flu virus is less than the risk for younger age groups.

Why are pregnant women a high priority for vaccination?

- Pregnant women have accounted for a disproportionate number of deaths from the 2009 H1N1 flu.
- The flu shot also protects the baby. Babies born to mothers who had the flu shot get sick with flu less often than do babies whose mothers did not get the flu shot.
- In addition to vaccine, pregnant women who develop flu symptoms should contact their doctor as soon as possible. Early treatment with anti-viral medication is recommended for pregnant women with flu symptoms.

Can the pregnant women or her family members receive the nasal spray vaccine?

- Pregnant women should **not** receive the live nasal spray influenza vaccine (only the injectable vaccine is given).
- Family and household members and other close contacts of pregnant women who are 2 through 49 years old, healthy and not pregnant may receive live nasal spray vaccine.

Will my doctor have the 2009 H1N1 flu vaccine available?

- The Marion County Health Department is distributing 2009 H1N1 flu vaccine to doctors who request the vaccine for identified high risk groups.

What will the 2009 H1N1 flu vaccine cost?

- The 2009 H1N1 flu vaccine has been purchased by the government.
- Marion County Health Department will not charge for 2009 H1N1 flu vaccine.
- Your private doctor can only charge an administration fee.
- Medicare and Medicaid will cover the administration fee.

How many doses of 2009 H1N1 flu vaccine will be needed to provide protection?

- Adults will need 1 dose, as should children and adolescents 10 years of age and older.
- Children 9 years of age and younger will need 2 doses. It is recommended that the two doses be separated by at least 4 weeks.

Can the seasonal flu and 2009 H1N1 flu vaccines be given on the same day?

- Inactivated 2009 H1N1 vaccine (shot) can be administered at the same visit as any other vaccine. *Thus, a person can receive a seasonal flu shot and a 2009 H1N1 shot on the same day.*
- Two nasal spray (Flu Mist®) cannot be given on the same day.
- Nasal spray (Flu Mist®) seasonal and nasal spray (Flu Mist®) 2009 H1N1 vaccines must be separated by 4 weeks.

What are most likely side effects of flu vaccine?

- The risk of a vaccine causing serious harm is extremely small.
- The most likely side effect is soreness, redness, or swelling where the shot was given.
- Some people might experience headache, muscle aches, fever, nausea and fainting. If these problems occur, they usually begin soon after the shot and may last as long as 1-2 days. This is not the flu.

Can I get flu from the flu vaccine?

- The viruses used to make inactivated influenza vaccine have been killed, so you cannot get influenza from the vaccine.
- The viruses to make the nasal spray vaccine (Flu Mist) are so weak that they do not cause illness.

Since the flu vaccine is grown in eggs, can people allergic to eggs take the vaccine?

- Tell your doctor if you have any **severe** (life-threatening) allergy to eggs.
- People with a severe egg allergy should not get the vaccine.
- If you have had a severe reaction after a previous dose of influenza vaccine, tell your doctor.
- Signs of a severe allergic reaction can include difficulty breathing, hoarseness or wheezing, hives, paleness, weakness, a fast heart beat or dizziness.

Do those that have been previously vaccinated against the 1976 swine flu need to get the 2009 H1N1 flu vaccine?

- Yes, if you are in a target group for the 2009 H1N1 vaccine.
- The 1976 swine flu virus and the 2009 H1N1 virus are different enough that its unlikely a person vaccinated in 1976 will have full protection from the 2009 H1N1.

Should I get vaccinated against 2009 H1N1 if I have had flu-like illness since the Spring of 2009?

- Most doctors are not testing for the specific 2009 H1N1 flu virus.
- Since most people with flu-like illnesses have not been tested for the 2009 H1N1, the majority will not know whether they have been infected with 2009 H1N1 flu or a different virus.
- Therefore, if you were ill but do not know if you had 2009 H1N1 infection, you should get vaccinated, if your doctor recommends it.
- Vaccination of a person who had 2009 H1N1 flu is not harmful. Thus, if you had the flu and get vaccinated, the vaccine will not harm you.

If I have a cold, can I get flu vaccine?

Yes. You can receive flu vaccine even if you have a mild cold.

Will Medicare pay for seasonal flu and pneumonia vaccines?

Yes.

Where will the MCHD clinics for 2009 H1N1 flu vaccine be located?

Once the sites are confirmed, the location of clinics will be made available to the media and found at www.mchd.com.

When will MCHD begin giving 2009 H1N1 flu vaccine to the public?

As soon as the vaccine is available for the general public, MCHD will have clinic information at www.mchd.com and the media will be notified. The flu hotline (221-2121) will have information about 2009 H1N1 flu vaccination opportunities.

Where can I go for more information?

- The MCHD seasonal flu clinic hotline is 221-2121.
- Preparing for the Flu (both seasonal and 2009 H1N1): CDC Toolkit for Schools (K-12):<http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/schools/toolkit/pdf/schoolflutoolkit.pdf>
- Preparing for the Flu (both seasonal and 2009 H1N1): CDC Toolkit for Child Care: http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/childcare/toolkit/pdf/childcare_toolkit.pdf
- Preparing for the Flu (both seasonal and 2009 H1N1): CDC Toolkit for Business: http://www.cdc.gov/H1N1flu/business/toolkit/pdf/Business_Toolkit.pdf
- Provider request for H1N1 vaccine is found at www.mchd.com
- Inquiries about Marion County Health Department educational presentation can be made by contacting the Health, Education, Promotion, and Training at 317-221-8965.