

1. What is the Influenza A(H1N1) virus?

This is a new type of influenza or “flu” virus that is currently causing outbreaks of disease in people in numerous countries. It spreads from person to person through coughing or sneezing by people with influenza. Occasionally, people may become infected by touching surfaces contaminated with the virus, and then touching their own mouth or nose.

2. What are the symptoms of A(H1N1) infection?

The symptoms are similar to those of regular seasonal flu and include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, lethargy, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people have reported diarrhoea and vomiting associated with this virus.

3. How can I protect myself from A(H1N1)?

Protective measures to avoid getting or spreading the influenza A (H1N1) virus are the same as for the seasonal flu, and most other respiratory infections. You can prevent getting infected by avoiding close contact with people who show influenza-like symptoms (trying to maintain a distance of about 1 meter if possible) and taking the following measures:

- avoid touching your mouth and nose;
- clean hands thoroughly with soap and water;
- avoid close contact with people who might be ill;
- reduce the time spent in crowded settings if possible;
- improve airflow in your living space by opening windows;
- practice good health habits, including adequate sleep, eating nutritious food, and keeping physically active.

4. What should I do if I am sick with flu like symptoms?

If you experience flu-like symptoms such as fever, cough or sore throat, you should:

- stay in your home and avoid close contact with others until at least 24 hours after your symptoms are completely gone.
- Wash your hands frequently, and always cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze with a tissue or handkerchief.
- Wear a simple surgical mask when meeting others.
- You do not need to rush to the hospital for mild illness. You must, however, inform your family/friends and supervisor at office, by telephone.
- If you have severe symptoms such as difficulty in breathing, pain or pressure in the chest or

abdomen, sudden dizziness, confusion and severe or persistent vomiting, you should seek medical care immediately by calling your physician/pre-identified health care facility.

5. If I am ill, will I need antiviral medicine such as Oseltamivir?

At this time, most of the influenza A (H1N1) cases appear to be mild, similar to regular seasonal influenza. Therefore you should rest, drink plenty of liquids, and only take medications that you would normally take to treat your symptoms (e.g. of fever, cough, sore throat).

Flu patients with additional health risks, such as severe chronic disease (e.g. asthma, bronchitis, heart disease, kidney & liver disease, diabetes, HIV, cancer, etc.) which may lower immunity, should seek treatment from a health care provider, when ill.

You should take antiviral medicine Oseltamivir only if prescribed by a doctor and ensure that you take the full course. Please do not use Oseltamivir for prevention of illness, unless prescribed by a doctor, as this may result in the virus becoming resistant to the drug.

6. What is an influenza pandemic?

A disease epidemic occurs when there are more cases of that disease than normal. A pandemic is a worldwide epidemic of a disease. An influenza pandemic may occur when a new influenza virus appears against which the human population has no immunity.

With the increase in global transport, as well as urbanization and overcrowded conditions in some areas, epidemics due to a new influenza virus are likely to take hold around the world, and become a pandemic faster than before.

WHO has defined the phases of a pandemic to provide a global framework to aid countries in pandemic preparedness and response planning. Pandemics can be either mild or severe in the illness and death they cause, and the severity of a pandemic can change over the course of that pandemic.

7. In view of the outbreak, is it safe to travel?

Yes. WHO is not recommending travel restrictions. Today, global travel is commonplace and large numbers of people move around the world for business and leisure. Limiting travel and imposing restrictions would have very little effect on stopping the virus from spreading, but would be highly disruptive to the global community.

Influenza A(H1N1) has already been confirmed in many parts of the world. The global response now focuses on minimizing the impact of the virus through the rapid identification of cases, and providing patients with appropriate medical care, rather than on stopping its spread internationally.

Scientific research shows that restricting travel would be of limited or no benefit in stopping the spread of disease. Historical records of previous influenza pandemics, as well as experience with SARS, validate this.

8. What measures should I take while travelling?

Travellers can protect themselves and others by following simple prevention practices that apply while travelling and in daily life.

- One of the most important preventive practice is careful and frequent handwashing.
- Avoid close contacts with sick people.
- If you think you may have been exposed to the Novel Influenza A (H1N1) virus:
 - Monitor your health for seven days.
 - If you become ill with fever and develop a cough or if you develop any illness during this seven day period, inform your health care provider immediately. Stay at home and avoid close contact with others. Wash your hands frequently and always cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze with a tissue or handkerchief.
 - Do not travel while sick. People who are ill should delay travel plans.

9. What about using a mask? What does WHO recommend?

If you are not sick you do not have to wear a mask.

If you are caring for a sick person, you can wear a mask when you are in close contact with the ill person and dispose of it immediately after contact, and cleanse your hands thoroughly afterwards.

If you are sick and must travel or be around others, cover your mouth and nose.

Using a mask correctly in all situations is essential. Incorrect use actually increases the chance of spreading infection.

10. Are some people more at risk?

More study is needed to determine if some populations (i.e. younger or older people, or people with other medical conditions) could be affected by the outbreak, or if they are at higher risk for severe illness. WHO recommends that everyone take precautions to prevent the spread of infection.

11. Are there any special recommendations for pregnant women?

Yes, they are vulnerable. Like everyone, they should take all the necessary precautions

12. What about breastfeeding? Should I stop if I am ill?

No, not unless your health care provider advises it. Studies on other influenza infections show that breastfeeding is most likely protective for babies - it passes on helpful maternal immunities and lowers the risk of respiratory disease. Breastfeeding provides the best overall nutrition for babies and increases their defense factors to fight illness.

13. Is it safe to eat pork and pork products?

Yes. The influenza A(H1N1) has not been shown to be transmissible to people through eating properly handled and prepared pork (pig meat) or other products derived from pigs. The influenza A(H1N1) virus is killed by cooking temperatures of 160°F/70°C, corresponding to the general guidance for the preparation of pork and other meat.

14. What are the potential consequences of a pandemic?

In the past, influenza pandemics have resulted in increased death and disease and great social disruption. In the 20th century, the most severe influenza pandemic occurred in 1918-1919 and caused an estimated 40 to 50 million deaths world wide.

Current epidemiological models project that a pandemic could result in two to seven million deaths globally.

If an influenza pandemic were to occur today, we could expect the virus to spread rapidly due to the interconnected nature of the world and the high level of global travel.

If the pandemic evolved to become severe and widespread over time, we could also expect:

- vaccines, antiviral agents and antibiotics to treat secondary infections to be in high demand, and potentially in short supply;
- medical facilities to be strained with demands to care for both influenza and non-influenza patients;
- potentially significant shortages of personnel to provide essential community services.

For updates on situation in India visit:

<http://mohfw.nic.in/SWINEFLU.htm>

www.whoindia.org

For more information visit:

www.searo.who.int/h1n1

www.who.int