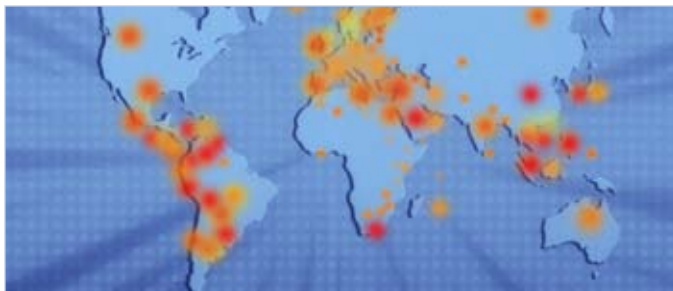


# Are We in an Influenza Pandemic? Yes!

## H1N1 (Swine Flu)

A pandemic is a global outbreak of a disease that spreads easily from person to person and is affecting people around the world. On June 11, 2009, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared that a global pandemic of novel influenza A (H1N1) was underway.



Novel H1N1 influenza A is a respiratory virus that first caused illness in Mexico and the United States in spring 2009. It is caused by type A influenza virus, which is the only type of influenza virus to have caused human pandemics. In fact, a variant of influenza A (H1N1) caused the flu pandemic of 1918, which killed more than 500,000 people in the United States. Novel H1N1 influenza A is also called swine flu.

## Emergence of the Virus

Influenza viruses change constantly. The form of the H1N1 flu virus that emerged in spring 2009 had never been seen before, so it is called a novel (new) virus. Because it is a new virus, most people's immune systems do not know how to fight it.

The virus was declared a pandemic because of its rapid spread around the globe, not because of its severity. The first wave of pandemic H1N1 was surprisingly mild, comparable to a seasonal flu.

However, much like the virus that caused the 1918 flu pandemic, this new H1N1 flu virus affects young adults and school children in greater numbers than expected. (Seasonal flu primarily affects the very young, the elderly, and those with chronic illnesses or compromised immune systems.) Another disturbing resemblance to the 1918 flu virus is that this new virus can spread beyond the upper respiratory tract to go deep into the lungs. In addition, the new virus has the unexpected ability to continue

spreading throughout the summer. Health experts are concerned that as the virus circulates around the globe, it will change in ways that will cause more severe illness and lead to more deaths.

## How the New H1N1 Flu Virus Spreads

Researchers believe that the new H1N1 flu virus spreads mainly from person to person through coughing or sneezing, just as the annual flu virus spreads. People can also become infected by touching something (such as a doorknob or desktop) that has flu viruses on it and then touching their eyes, nose, or mouth.



## Vaccine for Novel H1N1

Vaccines are one of the most effective ways to protect people from getting sick during influenza epidemics and pandemics. Human trials for a new H1N1 flu vaccine will start in early August in the hope of getting an approved vaccine to those who will need it most by October.

The vaccine will be available both as a shot and as a nasal mist. An advisory committee for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that pregnant women, parents and caretakers of young children, all healthcare workers, people between the ages of 6 months and 24 years, and non-elderly adults with underlying medical conditions should be first in line to get the new influenza vaccine when it becomes available.

## Vaccine for Seasonal Flu

It's important to remember that the seasonal flu vaccine will not protect against novel H1N1 and that the novel H1N1 vaccine will not protect against seasonal flu. The best way to stay flu-free is to receive both vaccinations, if possible.

## How to Prevent the Spread of the New Flu

Simple steps can help prevent the spread of the new flu virus and other germs that make people sick.

- Stay home from work or school if you have symptoms of the flu!
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
- If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve, not your hands.
- Put your used tissue in the waste basket.
- Wash your hands with soap and water after coughing or sneezing.
- If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand cleaner.



## Symptoms of Illness

The symptoms of flu caused by the new H1N1 virus are the same as for seasonal flu. These symptoms include sudden onset of:

- headache
- chills
- sore throat
- runny nose
- fever
- body aches
- non-productive cough

Some people have also reported symptoms of vomiting and/or diarrhea with the new H1N1 infection.

## When to Seek Medical Help

Anyone who is sick should stay home. Sick children and teens should be kept home and not allowed to go to school, to the mall or other public places, or to visit friends. People who are only mildly ill and don't have other medical problems should stay home and rest.

In fact, most people get over the flu at home by getting plenty of bed rest, drinking lots of fluids, and taking pain relievers to reduce fever and ease body aches. However, there are good reasons to seek medical treatment, such as when symptoms are very **severe** and **quickly worsen**. In addition, some people can become extremely ill with novel H1N1 infection and require hospitalization. Here are some guidelines to help you determine when to seek medical help.

If you or a child in your household becomes sick and exhibits any of the following warning signs, call your medical provider immediately. Only go to emergency medical facilities as directed by your local health department.

### Warning Signs for children:

- fast breathing or trouble breathing
- bluish skin color
- not drinking enough fluids
- not waking up or not interacting
- being so irritable the child does not want to be held
- fever with a rash
- flu-like symptoms that improve but return with a fever and worse cough

### Warning signs for adults:

- difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- sudden dizziness
- confusion
- severe or persistent vomiting

## Steps to Stay Healthy

To protect your health:

- Know the signs and symptoms of the flu.
- Wash your hands properly and often.
- Keep your hands away from your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- If possible, stay six (6) feet away from other people.
- Eat a healthy diet, get plenty of rest, and exercise regularly.



**This fact sheet can be personalized for your organization. Contact ToucanEd at (888) 386-8226, or e-mail [info@toucaned.com](mailto:info@toucaned.com).**

