

# Guidance for Novel Influenza A H1N1 (Swine Flu): Taking Care of a Sick Person in Your Home

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This document has been adapted from a document produced on August 5, 2009 by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention. It can be accessed at the website [http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/guidance\\_homecare.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/guidance_homecare.htm).

Novel influenza A H1N1 virus infection (swine flu) can cause a wide range of symptoms, including fever, ( $\geq 100^{\circ}$  F or  $37.8^{\circ}$  C), cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people have reported diarrhea and vomiting as well. Like seasonal flu, swine flu in humans can vary in severity from mild to severe. Severe disease with pneumonia, respiratory failure and even death is possible with swine flu infection. Certain groups may be more likely to develop severe illness from swine flu infection, such as pregnant women and persons with chronic medical conditions. Sometimes bacterial infections can occur at the same time or after infection with influenza viruses, and cause pneumonia, ear infections, or sinus infections.

The following information can help you provide safer care at home for sick persons with influenza.

## How Flu Spreads

The main way that influenza viruses are thought to spread is from person to person in respiratory droplets of coughs and sneezes. This can happen when droplets from a cough or sneeze of an infected person are propelled through the air and deposited on the mouth or nose of people nearby. Influenza viruses may also be spread when a person touches respiratory droplets on another person or object and then touches their own mouth or nose (or someone else's mouth or nose) before washing their hands.

## People With Flu Who are Cared for at Home Should:

- Check with their health care provider about any special care they might need if they are pregnant or have a health condition such as diabetes, heart disease, asthma, or emphysema.
- Check with their health care provider about whether they should take antiviral medications.
- Keep away from others as much as possible to prevent making others sick. Do not go to work or school while ill.
- Wear a facemask if you can when sharing common spaces with other household members to help prevent spreading the virus to others. This is especially important when others in the household are at high risk for complications of influenza.
- Stay home for at least 24 hours after fever is gone without the use of fever-reducing medicine, except to seek medical care or for other necessities.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Drink plenty of clear non-alcoholic fluids (such as water, broth, sports drinks, electrolyte beverages for infants) to prevent dehydration.
- Cover coughs and sneezes, then immediately clean hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub. Clean hands often, especially after using tissues or after coughing or sneezing into hands.
- Be watchful for emergency warning signs (see next page) that might indicate you need to seek medical attention.

## Persons Who Are at Higher Risk for Complications From Influenza

- Children less than 5 years old
- Adults 65 years of age or older
- Persons less than 19 years of age receiving long-term aspirin therapy
- Pregnant women
- Persons with chronic lung, heart, liver, kidney, blood, nerve, neuromuscular or metabolic disorders
- Residents of nursing homes and other chronic care facilities

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## Medications to Help Lessen Symptoms of the Flu

### **Always check with your healthcare provider or pharmacist for correct, safe use of medications**

Antiviral medications can sometimes help lessen influenza symptoms, but require a prescription. Most people do not need these antiviral drugs to fully recover from the flu. However, persons at higher risk for severe flu complications, or those with severe flu illness who require hospitalization, might benefit from antiviral medications. Antiviral medications are available for persons 1 year of age and older. Ask your healthcare provider whether you need antiviral medication.

Persons with influenza infections may also develop bacterial infections. Therefore, some people will also need to take antibiotics. More severe or prolonged illness, or illness that seems to get better then gets worse again may be an indication that a person has a bacterial infection. Check with your healthcare provider if you have concerns.

**Warning!** Do **not** give aspirin (acetylsalicylic acid) to children or teenagers who have the flu; this can cause a rare but serious illness called Reye's syndrome. For more information about Reye's syndrome, visit the National Institute of Health website at [www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/reyes\\_syndrome/reyes\\_syndrome.htm](http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/reyes_syndrome/reyes_syndrome.htm)

- Check ingredient labels on over-the-counter cold and flu medications to see if they contain aspirin.
- Persons 5 years of age and older with the flu can take medicines **without** aspirin, such as acetaminophen (Tylenol®) and ibuprofen (Advil®, Motrin®, Nuprin®), to relieve symptoms.

Generic Name	Brand Name(s)
Acetaminophen	Tylenol®
Ibuprofen	Advil®, Motrin®, Nuprin®
Naproxen	Aleve

- Children younger than 4 years of age should only be given over-the-counter cold medications after consulting with a healthcare provider.
- The safest care for flu symptoms in children younger than 2 years of age is using a cool-mist humidifier and a suction bulb to help clear away mucus.
- Fevers and aches can be treated with acetaminophen (Tylenol®) or ibuprofen (Advil®, Motrin®, Nuprin®) or nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs.
- Over-the-counter cold and flu medications used according to the package instructions may help lessen some symptoms such as cough and congestion. However, these medications will not lessen how infectious a person is or how long a person can spread influenza to others.
- Check the ingredients on the package label to see if the medication already contains acetaminophen or ibuprofen before taking additional doses of these medications—don't double dose!
- Patients with kidney disease or stomach problems should check with their health care provider before taking any anti-inflammatory drugs.

## When to Seek Emergency Medical Care

Get medical care right away if the sick person at home:

- has difficulty breathing or chest pain
- has purple or blue discoloration of the lips
- is vomiting and unable to keep liquids down
- has signs of dehydration such as dizziness when standing, absence of urination, or in infants, a lack of tears when they cry
- has seizures (for example, uncontrolled convulsions)
- is less responsive than normal or becomes confused

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## **Steps to Lessen the Spread of Flu in the Home**

When providing care to a household member who is sick with influenza, the most important ways to protect yourself and others who are not sick are to:

- Keep the sick person away from other people as much as possible (see “placement of the sick person”).
- Remind the sick person to cover their coughs, and clean their hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub often, especially after coughing and/or sneezing or using a tissue.
- Have everyone in the household clean their hands often, using soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub. Children may need frequent reminders or help keeping their hands clean.
- Ask your healthcare provider if household contacts of the sick person, particularly those contacts that may have chronic health conditions, should take antiviral medications such as oseltamivir (Tamiflu®) or zanamivir (Relenza®) to prevent the flu.
- If you are in a group at higher risk for complications from influenza, you should attempt to avoid close contact (within 6 feet) with household members who are sick with influenza. If close contact with a sick individual is unavoidable, consider wearing a facemask if available and tolerable. Infants should not be cared for by sick family members.

### ***Placement of the sick person***

- Unless necessary for medical care or other necessities, people who are sick with an influenza-like illness should stay home and keep away from others as much as possible, including avoiding travel, for at least 24 hours after fever is gone without the use of fever-reducing medicine. This will keep from making others sick. Children, especially younger children, might be contagious for longer periods of time.
- If persons with the flu must leave the home (for example, for medical care), they should wear a facemask, if available and tolerable, and cover their nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing.
- Have the sick person wear a facemask - if available and tolerable - if they must be in a common area of the house near other persons.
- Keep the sick person in a room separate from the common areas of the house (For example, a spare bedroom with its own bathroom, if that’s possible.). Keep the sickroom door closed.
- If possible, sick persons should use a separate bathroom. This bathroom should be cleaned daily with household disinfectant according to directions on the product label.

### ***Protect other persons in the home***

- The sick person should not have visitors other than caregivers. A phone call is safer than a visit.
- If possible, have only one adult in the home taking care of the sick person. People at increased risk of severe illness from flu should not be the designated caregiver.
- If you are in a group at higher risk for complications from influenza, you should attempt to avoid close contact (within 6 feet) with household members who are sick with influenza. If close contact with a sick individual is unavoidable, consider wearing a facemask.
- Avoid having pregnant women care for the sick person as they are at increased risk of influenza-related complications, and their immunity can be suppressed during pregnancy.
- Avoid having sick family members care for infants and others at higher risk for complications.
- All persons in the household should clean their hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub frequently, including after every contact with the sick person or the person’s room or bathroom.
- Use paper towels for drying hands after hand washing or dedicate cloth towels to each person in the household. For example, have different colored towels for each person to use.
- When possible, maintain good ventilation in shared household areas (e.g., keeping windows open in kitchen, bathroom, etc.).
- Antiviral medications can be used to prevent the flu, so check with your healthcare provider to see if any caregivers or persons in the home should use antiviral medications.

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### ***If you are the caregiver***

- Avoid being face-to-face with the sick person.
- When holding small children who are sick, place their chin on your shoulder so that they will not cough in your face.
- Clean your hands with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand rub after you touch the sick person or anything in their environment.
- Talk to your health care provider about taking antiviral medication to prevent you from getting the flu.
- If you are in a group at higher risk for complications from influenza, you should attempt to avoid close contact (within 6 feet) with household members who are sick with influenza. Designate a person who is not at higher risk of flu-associated complications as the primary caregiver of those who are sick if at all possible. If close contact with a sick individual is unavoidable, consider wearing a facemask.
- **Monitor yourself and household members for flu symptoms and contact your health care provider if symptoms occur.**

### **Using Facemasks or Respirators**

- If you must have close contact with the sick person (for example, holding a sick infant), spend the least amount of time possible in close contact and try to wear a facemask or N95 disposable respirator.
- Facemasks and respirators may be purchased at a pharmacy, building supply or hardware store.
- An N95 respirator that fits snugly on your face can prevent small particles from entering around the edges of the mask. Compared with a regular facemask, it is harder to breathe through an N95 mask for long periods of time. More information on masks and respirators can be found at <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/masks.htm>.
- Wear an N95 respirator if you help a sick person with respiratory treatments using a nebulizer or inhaler (as directed by their doctor). Respiratory treatments should be performed in a separate room away from common areas of the house when at all possible.
- Used facemasks and N95 respirators should be taken off and placed immediately in the regular trash so they don't touch anything else.
- Avoid re-using disposable facemasks and N95 respirators if possible. If a reusable fabric mask is used, it should be laundered with normal laundry detergent and tumble-dried in a hot dryer.
- After you take off a facemask or N95 respirator, clean your hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

### **Household Cleaning, Laundry, and Waste Disposal**

- Immediately place tissues and other disposable items used by the sick person in the trash. Wash your hands after touching used tissues and other possibly contaminated objects or surfaces.
- Keep surfaces (especially bedside tables, surfaces in the bathroom, and toys for children) clean by wiping them down with a household disinfectant according to directions on the product label.
- Linens, eating utensils, and dishes belonging to those who are sick do not need to be cleaned separately, but these items should not be shared without washing thoroughly first.
- Wash linens (such as bed sheets and towels) with household laundry soap and tumble dry on a hot setting. Avoid "hugging" laundry prior to washing it to prevent contaminating yourself. Clean your hands with soap and water or alcohol-based hand rub right after handling dirty laundry.
- Eating utensils should be washed in a dishwasher or by hand using soap and water.

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