



Benton County Public Health

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Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

Novel Influenza A (H1N1) Fact Sheet ~ Schools

What is Novel Influenza A (H1N1) Virus?

The Novel Influenza A (H1N1) Virus that is currently circulating in the U.S. and other parts of the world is a unique combination of swine and human flu viruses. This virus is transmitted from person-to-person, not from pigs to humans. None of the current cases had exposure to swine.

What are the symptoms of H1N1?

The symptoms of H1N1 are similar to the symptoms of regular seasonal flu and include fever, cough, sore throat, rhinorrhea (runny nose), nasal congestion, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people have reported diarrhea and vomiting along with respiratory symptoms. Like seasonal flu, H1N1 may be more severe in those who have chronic medical conditions.

How does H1N1 spread?

The current H1N1 virus spreads the same way as seasonal flu. Flu viruses are spread by an ill person coughing or sneezing. Sometimes people can become infected by touching surfaces with flu viruses (such as a door knob) and then touching their mouth or nose.

How long can an infected person spread H1N1 to others?

People with H1N1 are potentially contagious as long as they have symptoms and possibly for up to 7 days after they become ill. Children, especially younger children, might be contagious for longer than 7 days.

Will my seasonal flu vaccine protect me from H1N1?

No, the seasonal flu vaccine will not protect you from H1N1.

Is there a vaccine for H1N1?

Vaccines are being manufactured for the prevention of novel influenza A (H1N1).

Where can I get H1N1 vaccine?

Federal vaccine supplies will be distributed to the Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH). In turn, IDPH will distribute to Benton County Public Health with specific expectations regarding priority population groups that are intended to receive the vaccine. A local planning group is established and is working on distribution measures. It is expected that vaccine may be available late fall.

I have heard that school children are a “priority” group?

Yes, school age children are on the list of five priority groups. As vaccine becomes available distribution to the five priority groups will take place. If the vaccine supply is limited the priority groups are narrowed. Currently Benton County Public Health does not know how many doses will be in the primary shipment.

Are there medicines I can take if I get sick with H1N1?

Yes. If you get sick, antiviral drugs can make your illness milder and make you feel better faster. They may also prevent serious flu complications. They are usually used only for those at high risk of becoming seriously ill. For treatment, antiviral drugs work best if started soon after getting sick (within 2 days of when your symptoms start).

Can I get some antiviral drugs to keep at home, just in case I get sick?

No. You should not ask your healthcare provider for antiviral medication to keep at home “just in case”. If many people did this, it would mean less antivirals available for those who do get sick.

Can I get H1N1 from eating or preparing pork?

No. H1N1 virus is not spread by food. You cannot get this H1N1 from eating pork or pork products.

How long can viruses live outside the body on a surface like a doorknob?

In general, H1N1 virus can survive in the environment for several hours, depending on environmental factors like temperature, humidity, exposure to sunlight, etc. It is important to regularly and routinely disinfect potentially contaminated surfaces to minimize potential exposures. Environmental surfaces such as hand rails, computer keyboards, shared desks, and hand contact areas of drinking fountains can harbor viruses when contaminated with a body secretion from infectious persons.

What should be done to prevent or reduce the spread of H1N1 in schools?

- **Stay home when sick.** Any staff or child suspected of having H1N1 should not attend school/work. It is important that staff and children should not return to your school until he/she is free of fever without fever reducing medication.
- **Wash hands often.** Wash hands frequently using soap and warm water for 20 seconds (this is generally around the time it takes to sing the ABC's).
- **Wash after wiping noses.** Proper hand washing is particularly important after wiping your own or someone else's nose, or after contact with drool, saliva or nose drainage.
- **Separation.** Students and staff who appear to have flu-like illness should be sent to a room separate from others until they can be sent home. Those who care for ill students and staff wear protective gear such as a surgical mask if possible.
- **Cover your cough.** Influenza can be spread from coughs or sneezes. Make sure tissues are available for runny noses and sneezing. Staff and children should cover their mouth with their upper arm or a tissue when coughing and use a tissue when sneezing or blowing their nose.
- **Avoid close contact.** All children and staff should avoid sharing of saliva by not sharing glasses, forks, and spoons. Increase desk spacing in classrooms if possible.

What if we have a student we believe has H1N1?

The points noted above can be utilized to prevent or reduce the spread of influenza including H1N1 in your school. If you have questions, please contact Benton County Public Health.

Clean frequently and appropriately

Frequently clean commonly used surfaces, such as door handles, handrails, toys, etc. Soap and hot water can be an effective viral disinfectant. In addition, H1N1 can be effectively killed by many common disinfectants including bleach or ammonia based cleaning products. The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) maintains a list of commercial disinfecting products that are effective against influenza A viruses for hard non-porous surfaces (<http://www.epa.gov/oppad001/influenza-a-product-list.pdf>). Follow the manufacturer's recommendations for use, dilution, and contact time. It is recommended that schools check to ensure the cleaning products and/or active ingredients they normally use, to be sure that they are effective against influenza A viruses in advance and change if needed. If an EPA listed product is not available an effective disinfecting solution can be made using bleach (sodium hypochlorite).

Specific Cleaning Guidance

- **School buses** – Recommendations for cleaning procedures are the same as above. Focus should be given to more frequent cleaning of commonly touched surfaces like hand rails. Otherwise normal cleaning procedures and frequencies should continue to be used.
- **Playground equipment** – Emphasis should be placed on teaching students proper hand hygiene practices (frequent hand washing and keeping hands away from the face) to reduce the risk of potential exposure.
- **Musical Instruments** – Emphasis should be placed on normal care and maintenance of shared instruments and to avoid sharing mouthpieces and reeds. Additionally frequent hand washing should be reinforced.

Additional resources for Schools:

- www.vghinc.com
- www.flu.gov
- <http://www.ready.gov>
- http://www.idph.state.ia.us/h1n1/#schools_child_care
- <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/>
- <http://www.nasn.org/>

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