

# Cornerstone **Pediatric** Urgent Care

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## Flu information for patients and families

### What is Influenza (also called Flu)?

The flu (influenza) is an infection of the nose, throat, and lungs caused by influenza viruses. There are many kinds of flu. Roughly, they can be divided into the normal seasonal types and the novel H1N1 flu. Seasonal flu is just as deadly to children as is the H1N1 flu. The best way to prevent the flu is by getting a flu vaccination each fall.

### What is novel H1N1 influenza?

Novel H1N1 influenza is a strain of influenza that typically infects pigs. It is different from annual influenza strains and from the avian, or bird, flu strains that have been in the news over the last few years. Strains from animals rarely infect humans; however, in the case of both the current outbreak and the recent avian flu outbreaks, the animal strains changed enough that they could infect humans. Infections in humans typically result from direct contact with infected animals. However, the infections currently occur in people who did not have recent contact with pigs. People cannot get swine (H1N1) flu from pork or pork products.

### Symptoms of Flu

- fever (usually high)
- sore throat
- headache
- runny or stuffy nose
- extreme tiredness
- stomach symptoms, such as nausea or vomiting and diarrhea
- dry cough
- (these GI symptoms are more common in kids than adults)

### Complications of Flu

Complications of flu can include bacterial pneumonia, ear infections, sinus infections, dehydration, and worsening of chronic medical conditions, such as congestive heart failure, asthma, or diabetes.

### How Flu Spreads

Influenza is spread by coughing, sneezing and unclean hands. The CDC recommends:

- Cover your nose and mouth 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 used tissues in the trash.
- Clean your hands after coughing or sneezing. Wash with soap and water, or with alcohol-based hand cleaner.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
- If you get sick, stay home from work or school, and limit your contact with others to keep from infecting them. People should stay home at least 24 hours after they are free of fever (100°F), or signs of a fever without the use of fever-reducing medications.

An annual influenza vaccination is the best way to protect you and your child against influenza.

### Will the yearly influenza vaccine protect against the novel H1N1?

Beginning with the 2010-2011 flu season, the seasonal flu vaccination does protect against H1N1 flu as well as the other seasonal flu strains.

### When should someone seek medical care?

A person should seek medical care if they experience shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, or if a fever continues more than three days. For parents with a young child who is ill, seek medical care if a child has fast or labored breathing, continuing fever, or convulsions (seizures), or for other serious problems, including:

- When high fever (> 101° F) lasts more than 3-4 days
- When you are so sick that you or your family cannot take care of you at home
- Extreme dizziness

- An infant who is not taking fluids and is starting to get dehydrated (not wetting diapers)
- Confusion or not acting normal

Not everyone with influenza needs to see a doctor. Most people get better with rest and fluids.

## When you have the Flu

- Stay home from work or school, and rest
- Drink plenty of non-caffeinated fluids
- Use acetaminophen or ibuprofen to help with fever and body aches
- Wash your hands often to protect other people
- Avoid getting close to other people, especially when coughing or sneezing
- Cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing
- Supportive care at home - resting, drinking plenty of fluids and using a pain reliever for aches - is adequate for recovery in most cases. (A non-aspirin pain reliever should be used by children and young adults because of the risk of Reye's syndrome.)

## How do I know if I have influenza A(H1N1)?

You will not be able to tell the difference between seasonal flu and influenza A (H1N1) without medical help. Typical symptoms to watch for are similar to seasonal viruses and include fever, cough, headache, body aches, sore throat and runny nose. Only your medical practitioner and local health authority can confirm a case of influenza A (H1N1). Unless you're very sick or have complications, your doctor won't test you for swine flu. There is no reason for the test. The test generally won't change treatment, and it's not very accurate.

## How long can a sick person spread the flu to others?

People infected with seasonal and novel H1N1 flu shed virus and may be able to infect others from 1 day before getting sick to 5 to 7 days after. This can be longer in some people, especially children and people with weakened immune systems and in people infected with novel H1N1 flu.

## What are the signs that my child with flu-like symptoms is getting worse?

- Trouble breathing or fast breathing
- Not drinking well
- Not urinating as much as usual
- Bluish or gray skin color
- Being irritable even after their fever goes down
- Not waking up normally or interacting normally
- Rash
- The fever goes down and flu symptoms get better, but then get worse again a day or two later

## What's the best treatment for flu?

There's no single "best" treatment for flu, but there are many ways you can ease symptoms. Prescription flu drugs can cut short the flu if taken when your first symptoms appear. Over-the-counter cold and flu medicines can offer some relief from fever and aches. They don't "cure" the flu, but may help keep you more comfortable.

What can help? Decongestants can help you breathe by shrinking swollen mucous membranes in your nose. Saline nasal sprays can also open breathing passages. Cough preparations are not generally effective. For minor coughs, water and fruit juices probably help the most. *(Note: Young people and children should not take aspirin because of the risk of Reye's syndrome. The FDA and manufacturers now say that over-the-counter cough and cold medicines should not be given to children under 6.)*

It's very important to drink a lot of fluids to keep your body hydrated. This helps prevent another infection from setting in. Avoid drinks like coffee, tea, and colas with caffeine. They rob your system of fluids. As for eating, follow your appetite. If you're not really hungry, try eating simple foods like white rice or broth. Antibiotics will not help treat the flu. Antibiotics kill bacteria, but they do not kill any viruses, including viruses that cause the flu or colds.