

Influenza H1N1 (“swine flu”)

Influenza H1N1 is a new type of influenza A (flu) virus. It is spread 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 a person nearby. It can also happen when a person comes in contact with respiratory droplets and then touches their own mouth or nose before washing their hands.

After exposure to the influenza H1N1 virus, it may take between 1-7 days (usually 1-4 days) before symptoms appear. Symptoms include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people also experience vomiting and diarrhea. People may be contagious to others from 1 day before they develop symptoms to up to 7 days after the onset of their illness. Children, especially younger children, may be contagious for longer periods.

To date, there have been thousands of cases of influenza H1N1 infection in New York State. Most cases have been mild and the vast majority of people infected recover without needing medical care. Not all patients with suspected influenza H1N1 infection need to be seen by a health care provider. Based on current guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and our state and county health departments, routine testing for influenza A or influenza H1N1 is not recommended for most patients with suspected infection. Patients with severe illness and those in the following high risk groups should contact our office for further direction regarding management of their illness:

- Children less than 5 years of age
- Patients with chronic lung conditions (including asthma), chronic heart conditions, chronic kidney and liver disease, metabolic disorders (including diabetes), neurologic or neuromuscular disorders, blood disorders, or those who are immune suppressed
- Children and adolescents (less than 18 years) who are receiving long-term aspirin therapy.

In rare cases, those with influenza H1N1 infection may develop more serious illness. Emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Pain or pressure in the chest
- Bluish or grey skin color
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Not waking up or interacting appropriately with others
- Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough.

The following measures can help to prevent the spread of Influenza H1N1 as well as other respiratory viruses:

- Wash hands often with soap and water. Use of an alcohol-based hand cleanser is also effective.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Stay at home when you are sick and keep away from other members of your household as much as possible.
- Cover your nose and mouth when you sneeze or cough. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it and wash your hands.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.
- Do not share personal items and clean shared spaces often.

