

H1N1 (Swine) Flu

10 May 2009

H1N1 (referred to as “Swine Flu” early on), a new influenza virus causing illness in people, has been in the news lately. This new virus was first detected in people in Mexico and then in the United States in April 2009. To date a total of 29 countries have reported more than 3,000 confirmed cases. This virus is spreading from person-to-person, probably in much the same way that regular seasonal influenza viruses spread. As yet no cases have been identified in Egypt.

Symptoms

The symptoms of this new H1N1 flu virus in people are similar to the symptoms of seasonal flu and include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. A significant number of people who have been infected with this virus also have reported diarrhea and vomiting. Also, like seasonal flu, severe illnesses and death have occurred in a few people as a result of illness associated with this virus.

Stay Up to Date

This situation continues to evolve so you may want to get more information and follow daily updates on the websites of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/> and, for an international perspective, the World Health Organization (WHO) <http://www.who.int> .

Prevention

There is no vaccine available right now to protect against this new H1N1 virus, although scientists are working hard to develop one before the next flu season. There are everyday actions that can help prevent the spread of germs that cause respiratory illnesses like influenza.

The most important prevention for any kind of viral or bacterial illness is **regular hand washing**, using soap, or alcohol-based hand wash and friction. One study in Egyptian school children has demonstrated a 30% decrease in “regular” seasonal influenza in schools that actively promote hand washing. CAC has been emphasizing hand washing for years, and parents can continue to remind all students to wash hands regularly, as well as the other preventative measures below.

Other everyday steps to protect your health:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it and wash your hands.
- Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- Stay home if you are sick for 7 days after your symptoms begin or until you have been symptom-free for 24 hours, whichever is longer. This is to keep from infecting others and spreading the virus further.

Other important actions that you can take are:

- Follow public health advice on the above websites.
- Be prepared in case you and your family get sick and need to stay home for a week or so; a supply of food, water, over-the-counter medicines, alcohol-based

hand rubs, tissues and other related items might could be useful and help avoid the need to make trips out in public while you are sick and contagious.

CAC continues to be in touch with the US Embassy Health Unit and Regional Security Office as well as the Naval American Medical Research Unit (NAMRU). We will continue to pass on any new information as we receive it.

Stay Well,
CAC Health Office