

Novel H1N1 Flu
Updated Key Points
May 20, 2009: 11:00 AM

H1N1 Update

- Influenza illness, including illness associated with the novel influenza A H1N1 virus is ongoing in the United States.
- There are localized outbreaks of novel H1N1 activity ongoing in several states.
- The states that have reported the most novel H1N1 activity are Arizona, California, Illinois, New York, Texas, Washington state and Wisconsin.
- Novel H1N1 viruses now make up 78% of all viruses analyzed by the U.S. World Health Organization/NREVESS collaborating laboratories (NREVESS is the The National Respiratory and Enteric Virus Surveillance System).
- On May 20, 2009 CDC reported a total of 5,710 probable and confirmed cases of novel H1N1 infection with 8 deaths.
- This number is thought to represent a small proportion of the total number of people who have been infected with the novel H1N1 virus.
 - This is an underestimate because
 - Many people ill with influenza-like symptoms do not seek medical care
 - Many who do seek medical care are not tested for influenza
- It's uncertain at this time how severe this novel H1N1 outbreak will be in terms of how many people infected have severe complications or death related to novel H1N1 infection.
- We are still learning about the severity and other epidemiological characteristics of the novel H1N1 virus.
- So far, the largest number of novel H1N1 confirmed and probable cases (more than 60% of cases) have been in people between the ages of 5 years and 24 years old.
- However, nearly 40% of hospitalizations have occurred in people between the ages of 19 and 49 years of age. And about 18% of hospitalized patients have been between the ages of 10 and 18 years old. Only 13% of hospitalizations have occurred in people 50 years and older.

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- Pregnancy and other previously recognized medical conditions from seasonal influenza appear to be associated with increased risk of complications from this novel H1N1 as well.
- Seventy-one percent (71%) of hospitalized patients have had underlying chronic medical conditions.
- Reported deaths have occurred in people ranging in age from 22 months old to 57 years old.
- There are few cases and no deaths in people older than 65 years, which is unusual when compared with seasonal flu.
- There is not enough information at this time to predict how severe this novel H1N1 outbreak will be in terms of illness and death or how it will compare with seasonal influenza.

School Closures

- At this time, schools across the country continue to close as a result of novel H1N1 flu activity based on local considerations.
- We know that children are susceptible to novel H1N1 flu, and schools or childcare facilities may act as a point of spread.
- As we know from seasonal flu, schools are a challenge. Aside from closing schools for an extended period of time in coordination with other means to reduce spread in a community, there is no approach that will completely stop or prevent transmission of flu in a school setting.
- There is a need for localized responses in schools, and when absentee rates are increasing in students and staff due to novel H1N1 flu illness, it is appropriate to close schools if they are not able to function.
- On May 5, CDC issued updated guidance for schools impacted by novel H1N1 flu infections. This guidance attempts to strike a balance between measures that may have an effect on slowing transmission and those that create other problems (such as disrupting education and sending kids to malls or other social gathering spots where they'd still be susceptible.)
- In the updated school guidance, CDC recommends that parents and guardians should monitor their school-aged children, and faculty and staff should self-monitor every morning for symptoms of flu-like illness.

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- CDC understands that parents are concerned about how to protect their children from novel H1N1 flu and other infectious diseases.
- As much as we wish there was, there is no approach that will guarantee protection from infectious diseases spread by flu viruses.
- This is why CDC is working to develop a vaccine for the novel H1N1 flu virus. Vaccines are not 100 percent effective, but they provide the best protection against viruses, such as flu.
- Antiviral medications can also be used to treat flu illness, and in some cases, to prevent flu infection. Use of antiviral medications for prevention may be particularly important for people at high risk of flu complications who have had a close exposure to someone with novel H1N1 flu
- Even if a school is closed for an extended period of time, both children and adults are still susceptible to flu if they have interactions with other people, some of whom may be shedding flu viruses even though they don't have symptoms.
- The largest number of novel H1N1 confirmed and probable cases are occurring in people from the ages of 5 to 24, so many of them are school-aged children.
- Students, faculty, and staff who have flu-like illness should stay home for 7 days after symptoms have started or at least 24 hours after symptoms resolve, whichever is longer, seeking medical care if symptoms are severe.
- Students, faculty and staff who appear to have flu-like illness or become ill during the school day should be isolated promptly in a room separate from other students and sent home.
- Any dismissal based on local considerations must be done while working closely with the local or state health departments.
- Schools and childcare facilities do not need to do extra cleaning (such as washing walls) before children can return.
- Schools can help teach students and staff how to reduce the spread of novel H1N1 flu through hand hygiene and cough etiquette.
- Washing hands or use of alcohol-based gels in schools or at home can offer protection.

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- People at high risk for flu associated complications who have had close contact with someone sick with flu should consider talking to their health care provider about influenza antiviral medications.

Seasonal Influenza Context

Flu seasons vary in timing, duration and severity.

Seasonal influenza can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death.

Each year, in the United States, on average:

- 5% to 20% of the population gets the flu;
- 36,000 people die from flu-related complications.
- More than 200,000 people are hospitalized from flu-related causes.
- Ninety percent of seasonal flu-related deaths occur among people 65 years and older.
- About 60 percent of hospitalizations occur in people 65 years and older.
- Illness rates are highest in school-aged children
- Serious complications from seasonal influenza are rare in school-aged children, but they do happen.
- 20,000 children younger than 5 years old are hospitalized each year from flu-related causes. (In children, the risk of hospitalization and death is highest in children younger than 2 years old.)
- On average, about 100 children per year die from flu-related causes. (During the 2007-08 flu season, CDC received reports that 86 children died from influenza-related complications. During the current flu season, CDC has received 59 reports of deaths in children younger than 18.)
- People age 65 years and older, people of any age with chronic medical conditions (such as asthma, diabetes, heart disease, and other conditions), pregnant women, and young children are more likely to get complications from seasonal influenza. The flu can make chronic health problems worse.