



Tips for H1N1 (Swine Flu) Prevention

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Since cancer indicates compromised immune function, the H1N1 "swine" flu presents a special challenge to people who are undergoing cancer treatment. Taking care may be your best line of defense. That includes warnings like, "Wash your hands." "Cover your mouth when you sneeze." "Don't pick your nose."

If reading this sends you back to the days when Mom knew best, you may want to revisit that time and embrace her wisdom. The flu season is here and, at this hour, a vaccine is not yet available. Your best defense against H1N1 infection may be practicing some simple, but effective health habits.

In June 2009, the World Health Organization signaled that an H1N1 influenza pandemic was underway. The pandemic could worsen dramatically as schools get back in session and we enter the fall flu season. Internationally, an H1N1 vaccine should be available by mid-October but that demand for the vaccine could surge beyond supply.

While Cancer Recovery Foundation does not make a recommendation either for or against H1N1 vaccination, people at risk for having serious complications from H1N1 will be first in line for the vaccine. This will include cancer patients. They would also be given priority for receiving potentially limited supplies of antiviral drugs that can minimize the length and severity of the flu and its complications.

Unlike the typical seasonal flu, older adults do not yet appear to be at increased risk for H1N1-related complications. Approximately one-third of adults over the age of 60 may have antibodies against this virus.

Even with the development of H1N1 vaccine, practicing basic health precautions at all times is key to minimizing the risk of catching or spreading H1N1 and other infectious diseases:

- **Prevention is protection.** Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze and throw the tissue in the trash after you use it. Wash your hands frequently with soap and water for at least 15 to 20 seconds, particularly after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective. Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Also, try to avoid contact with sick people.
- **Know the symptoms.** The symptoms of H1N1 include fever, chills, body aches, headache, nausea, sore throat, cough, runny or stuffy nose, fatigue, vomiting and diarrhea. If you have symptoms of H1N1, notify your healthcare provider and follow his or her advice. People in good health can often recover from the H1N1 flu without medical treatment. However, you should seek emergency treatment if you or your child experiences difficulty breathing, grey skin color, lethargy, confusion, persistent vomiting and/or diarrhea, or if flu symptoms appear to improve then return.
- **Call in sick.** Your co-workers and supervisors would rather you miss work than come in and spread the virus at work. The same applies for school, church, the mall, sports events and any other places where groups of people gather. Stay home and avoid close contact with people until at least 24 hours after the fever is gone.

By following these simple guidelines, you will increase your chances of staying healthy this flu season.

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