

## Preparing for the Upcoming Flu Season

**Flu is a serious contagious disease. Each year in the United States, on average, more than 200,000 people are hospitalized and 36,000 people die from seasonal flu complications.**

This flu season could be worse. There is a new and very different flu virus spreading worldwide. Commonly referred to as “swine flu,” the novel H1N1 virus may cause more illness or more serious illness than usual.

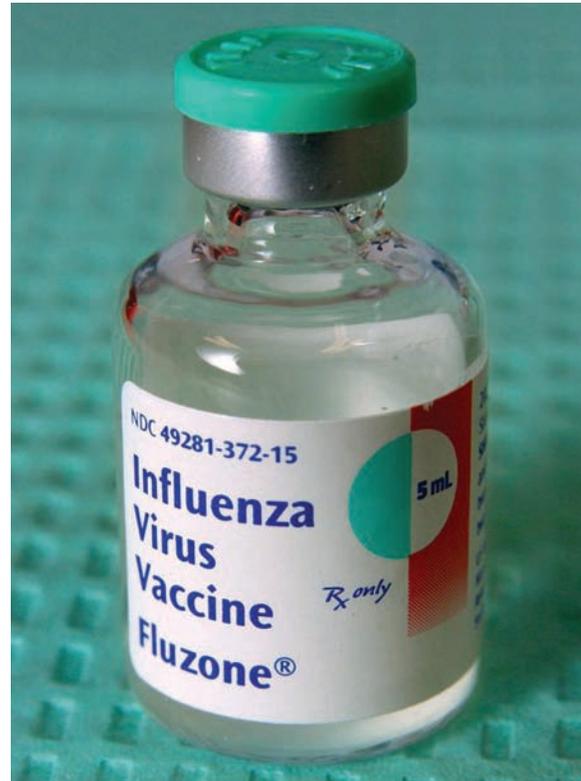
### Flu Pandemic is Inevitable

The word “pandemic” is used to describe a disease that affects people on a worldwide scale. Flu pandemics have occurred roughly every 20 to 30 years throughout history. The U.S. suffered three pandemics in the last century, in 1918, 1957 and 1968. The most devastating was “The Spanish Flu” pandemic of 1918 which killed over 500,000 Americans and caused an estimated 40 million deaths worldwide.

Three conditions must be met to result in a pandemic:

1. The emergence of a new flu strain
2. The ability of that strain to infect humans and cause serious illness
3. The ability to spread easily among humans

Scientists at the World Health Organization declared that the current situation indicates an active pandemic; other researchers remain



cautious that a pandemic is looming. But, most experts agree that the question is not if another flu pandemic will occur, but when. So, whether a pandemic strikes in the next few months or the next 20 years, public health officials agree that we should prepare for this eventuality now.

The secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Kathleen Sebelius, put it this way: “Over the course of coming weeks and months, we will move aggressively to prepare the nation for the possibility of a more severe outbreak of the H1N1 virus. We ask the American people to become actively engaged with their own preparation and prevention. It’s a responsibility we all share.”

## Preparedness Planning

When a pandemic hits, everyday life will be disrupted as many people in communities across the country suddenly fall ill at the same time. These disruptions could include widespread worker absenteeism, school and business closings, and interruptions of basic services such as public transportation, food delivery and health care.

The key to meeting these potential challenges is preparation—at every level, from cooperative global strategies and national policy to business continuity planning and individual action. Models of transmission of influenza show that an infection carried by just one person can be spread to tens or even hundreds of others. For this reason, individual action is critical to pandemic preparedness and response.

Spread of novel H1N1 virus is thought to occur in the same way that seasonal flu spreads. Flu viruses are spread mainly from person to person through coughing or sneezing by people with influenza. Sometimes people may become infected by touching something—such as a surface or an object—with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) urges people to take three steps to fight the flu:

- Get vaccinated
- Take everyday preventive actions
- Take antiviral drugs if recommended

Details of these steps are outlined in the attachment to this issue. These actions not only guard against seasonal flu—they can help protect against the new H1N1 virus, too.

## Stay Up-to-Date

Several government websites offer planning checklists to help individuals, families, communities and workplaces prepare and respond should an influenza pandemic take place this flu season. Information at these sites is updated regularly to offer the most current and accurate information:

<http://www.flu.gov>  
<http://www.osha.gov>  
<http://www.cdc.gov>  
<http://www.hhs.gov>  
<http://www.who.int>

### Flu-like Symptoms

People infected with seasonal and novel H1N1 flu shed virus and may be contagious from one day before getting sick to five to seven days after.

You can prevent getting infected by avoiding close contact with people who show influenza-like symptoms which include:

- Fever (usually high)
- Headache
- Extreme tiredness
- Dry cough
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle aches
- Sore throat
- Vomiting
- Sometimes diarrhea

The most fundamental ways to limit the spread of germs and help lessen the impact of seasonal or pandemic flu are to wash your hands often and practice respiratory etiquette (cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue, elbow or sleeve—not your hands).

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# CDC urges you to take 3 action steps to protect against the flu.

## #1

### Take time to get vaccinated.

- CDC recommends a yearly seasonal flu vaccine as the first and most important step in protecting against seasonal flu.
- The seasonal flu vaccine protects against the three seasonal viruses that research suggests will be most common.
- Vaccination is especially important for people at high risk of serious flu complications, including young children, pregnant women, people with chronic health conditions like asthma, diabetes or heart and lung disease and people 65 years and older.
- Seasonal flu vaccine also is important for health care workers, and other people who live with or care for high risk people to prevent giving the flu to those at high risk.
- A seasonal vaccine will not protect you against novel H1N1.
- A new vaccine against novel H1N1 is being produced and will be available in the coming months as an option for prevention of novel H1N1 infection.
- People at greatest risk for novel H1N1 infection include children, pregnant women, and people with chronic health conditions like asthma, diabetes or heart and lung disease.



## #2

### Take everyday preventive actions.

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. 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.
- If you are sick with flu-like illness, CDC recommends that you stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone except to get medical care or for other necessities. (Your fever should be gone without the use of a fever-reducing medicine.) Keep away from others as much as possible. This is to keep from making others sick.
- While sick, limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.

*\*Though the scientific evidence is not as extensive as that on hand washing and alcohol-based sanitizers, other hand sanitizers that do not contain alcohol may be useful for killing flu germs on hands in settings where alcohol-based products are prohibited.*



## #3

### Take flu antiviral drugs if recommended.

- If you get seasonal or novel H1N1 flu, antiviral drugs can treat the flu.
- Antiviral drugs are prescription medicines (pills, liquid or an inhaled powder) that fight against the flu by keeping flu viruses from reproducing in your body.
- Antiviral drugs can make your illness milder and make you feel better faster. They may also prevent serious flu complications.
- Antiviral drugs are not sold over-the-counter and are different from antibiotics.
- Antiviral drugs may be especially important for people who are very sick (hospitalized) or people who are sick with the flu and who are at increased risk of serious flu complications, such as pregnant women, young children and those with chronic health conditions.
- For treatment, antiviral drugs work best if started within the first 2 days of symptoms.

