



The Florida Department of Health will be launching a tollfree number to provide public health information and updates on H1N1 Swine flu. The information link

will be available from 8 AM to 8 PM Eastern time, 7 days a week. Information is available in English, Spanish and Creole.

**Details are as follows:**

Time: 8 a.m. to 9 p.m., **beginning Monday August 24, 2009**  
Telephone: 877-352-3581 or <http://www.doh.state.fl.us/DEMO/php/FluInfo.htm>

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## Swine Flu: What you Need to Know

Offered by Baptist Health Care

The swine flu continues to attract media attention. Before you cancel plans and lock yourself in the house, find out the answers to commonly asked questions about swine flu.

### ***What is swine flu?***

Swine flu, or H1N1 flu, is a respiratory disease of pigs caused by the type A influenza virus. Swine flu is not commonly reported in people; however this new virus was first detected in people in April 2009 in the United States. Other countries, including Mexico and Canada, also have reported case of new virus.

The virus was originally referred to as “swine flu” as a result of laboratory testing that showed many of the genes in this new virus were very similar to influenza viruses that normally occur in pigs in North America. Further research has shown that this new virus is very different from what is normally founds in North American pigs. It has two similar genes from flu viruses that circulate in pigs in Europe and Asia as well as avian genes and human genes. Scientists call this a “quadruple reassortant” virus.

### ***How does swine flu spread?***

Experts believe the swine influenza A (H1N1) virus spreads 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. People also may become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose.

Swine influenza viruses are not transmitted by food, and a person cannot get swine influenza from eating pork products. Again, the infections appear to spread from person to person.

### ***What are the symptoms?***

The symptoms of swine flu are similar to those of the regular flu—fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people also experience diarrhea and vomiting.

### ***How serious is swine flu infection?***

Again, like common seasonal flu, swine flu in humans can vary in severity from mild to severe. Consult a physician if you are concerned about your symptoms.

### ***Are there medicines to treat swine flu?***

Yes. Prescription antiviral medicines can prevent infection, make symptoms less severe and allow you to feel better faster. They may also prevent serious complications. Please note, not everyone needs these drugs—many of the first people in the U.S. with lab-confirmed swine flu got better without treatment.



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### ***Is there a swine flu vaccine?***

No. Researchers are currently working to make a vaccine, and expect one to be available in the coming months. Although, an exact timeframe for the release of a vaccine has not been confirmed, the CDC has developed recommendations on who should receive the vaccine when it becomes available. The CDC does not expect that there will be a shortage of novel H1N1 vaccine, but availability and demand can be unpredictable. There is some possibility that initially the vaccine will be available in limited quantities. In this setting, the committee recommended that the following groups receive the vaccine before others:

- pregnant women,
- people who live with or care for children younger than 6 months of age,
- health care and emergency medical services personnel with direct patient contact,
- children 6 months through 4 years of age, and
- children 5 through 18 years of age who have chronic medical conditions.

It is also important to note that the novel H1N1 vaccine is not intended to replace the seasonal flu vaccine. It is intended to be used alongside seasonal flu vaccine to protect people. Seasonal flu and novel H1N1 vaccines may be administered on the same day.

### ***What can I do to protect myself?***

You can help prevent the spread of germs and protect your health by:

- Covering your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, or cough/sneeze into your arm or elbow. Throw tissues in the trash, and wash your hands after using them.
- Washing your hands often with soap and water. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
- Avoiding touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs often enter your body through these areas.
- Trying to avoid contact with sick people.
- Staying home from work or school and limiting contact with others if you have flu-like symptoms.

### ***What is the best technique for washing my hands to avoid getting the flu?***

Washing your hands often will help protect you from germs. It is recommended that when you wash your hands with soap and warm water that you wash for 15 to 20 seconds. When soap and water are not available, alcohol-based disposable hand wipes or gel sanitizers may be used. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers are available in most supermarkets and drugstores. Be sure to rub your hands until the gel is dry.

### ***What should I do if I get sick?***

Contact your physician if you have flu-like symptoms. Ask your doctor if you need to stay home to prevent spreading the virus.

### ***Are there any warning signs?***

Yes. If you have trouble breathing; flu-like symptoms that worsen; a fever with a rash; chest or stomach pain; sudden dizziness or confusion; or persistent vomiting, seek emergency care.

### ***How is swine flu diagnosed in humans?***

To diagnose swine flu, a respiratory specimen would generally need to be collected within the first four to five days of illness. However, some persons, especially children, may spread virus for 10 days or longer. Identification at this time swine flu requires sending the specimen to CDC for laboratory testing.

### ***How long do I stay home if I'm sick? When can my child go back to school?***

People with a swine flu virus infection should be considered potentially contagious as long as they have symptoms, or at least seven days following the onset of the illness. Children, especially younger children, are potentially contagious for longer periods. Consult your physician as to when it is appropriate to return to school or work.



### ***What is the incubation period?***

According to information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the estimated incubation period for H1N1 swine flu is currently unknown, but could range anywhere from one to seven days. Recent reports indicate a likelihood of one to four days.

According to the CDC, adult bodies reproduce human influenza virus beginning the day before symptoms are felt and continue 5 to 10 day after illness onset. This "shedding period" can last even longer in young children and those with weakened immune systems.

Uncomplicated human influenza illness typically resolves after three to seven days, although cough and malaise can persist for more than two weeks. Human influenza virus infections can cause primary influenza viral pneumonia; worsen underlying medical conditions, such as pulmonary or cardiac disease; lead to secondary bacterial pneumonia or sinusitis; or cause co-infections with other viral or bacterial pathogens.

### ***Helpful Links***

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Swine influenza and you*. Available at: [http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/swineflu\\_you.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/swineflu_you.htm). Accessed April 30, 2009.

World Health Organization. *Swine influenza frequently asked questions*. Available at: [http://www.who.int/csr/swine\\_flu/swine\\_flu\\_faq\\_26april.pdf](http://www.who.int/csr/swine_flu/swine_flu_faq_26april.pdf). Accessed April 30, 2009.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *H1N1 flu (swine flu)*. Available at: <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/>. Accessed May 1, 2009.

You may also contact the Florida State Department of Health at 1-877-352-3581 or <http://www.doh.state.fl.us/DEMO/php/FluInfo.htm>. The hotline is open 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.