

## SEASONAL INFLUENZA AND NOVEL INFLUENZA (H1N1) 2009/2010

### What are influenza and novel influenza (H1N1)?

- Influenza is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses.
- Novel Influenza "swine flu" is a new influenza virus causing illness in humans and was first diagnosed in the United States in April 2009.

### What are common symptoms?

Influenza usually starts suddenly and symptoms MAY include: fever (often high), chills, headache, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, tiredness, sometimes diarrhea and vomiting.

*We have diagnosed patients of all ages with Influenza A -presumed novel influenza (H1N1), "swine flu"- since the spring. Their symptoms and course have been similar to seasonal influenza viral illnesses we see every year, which are generally mild.*

However, having these above symptoms does not mean a child has the flu. Many other viral illnesses, i.e. "the common cold" have similar symptoms.

### How is influenza spread?

Influenza viruses are spread the same way-- from coughs or sneezes from an infected person or someone touching infected objects and then touching his or her mouth or nose. Humans have no natural immunity to the H1N1 Influenza virus, which is why it has the potential to spread quickly and why it is such an important public health concern. We all can take steps to help minimize the spread of this infection, which are outlined below.

### What can I do to protect my child and myself?

Cover your nose and mouth when you cough or sneeze, wash your hands often (with soap and warm water or alcohol based hand cleaner), and avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.

### Why was a global pandemic declared?

The novel influenza H1N1 virus has now spread to more than 70 countries. The reason for the declaration is this spread across the world, not the severity of the illness caused by this virus.

How long is influenza contagious?

With seasonal flu, patients are contagious at least one day before developing symptoms and up to 7 days after they get sick. Novel (H1N1) flu patterns are similar.

### When should I keep my child home?

When children are sick with an influenza virus, it often lasts at least a week. You and your children *should stay home* and avoid travel, work, or school for *at least 24 hours after the fever is gone* (without using fever reducing medicines i.e. Tylenol, Motrin). Stay home even if you are using antiviral medicine. If you must leave the house, wear a facemask if possible.

### When should I bring my child to the doctor?

You should seek medical help urgently for your child if they have the following "emergency warning signs", as described by the CDC:

- *Fast breathing or trouble breathing*
- *Bluish or gray skin color*
- *Not drinking enough fluids*
- *Severe or persistent vomiting*
- *Not waking up or not interacting*
- *Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held*
- *Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough*

Also, if you are concerned that your child is more sick than you would normally expect with a viral illness, call us.

**Antiviral Medications- Who should get it?**

Treatment is available for patients with seasonal and novel influenza viruses who are severely ill within the first 2 days of illness. Not everyone can have medication because there would not be enough for those who need it most. These medicines are given to patients who are hospitalized and are at higher risk of severe illness from flu. Children at higher risk for seasonal flu have chronic medical conditions like asthma, heart disease, diabetes, are immunosuppressed, and are less than 2 years of age. Children at "higher risk" for novel influenza (H1N1) are similar to those at higher risk for seasonal flu. We will prescribe medication for both treatment and prophylaxis of our higher risk patients.

**Can I get a Tamiflu prescription to keep at home? No.**

The CDC does not recommend stockpiling antiviral medicine. Doing so will only cause increased resistance to the medication and cause it to become less effective.

**What can I do to help keep my child more comfortable?**

- For fever or aches, use acetaminophen or ibuprofen.
- For blocked/runny noses, use warm water or saline nose drops to loosen up the mucus and suction the mucous with a bulb. Or, for children > 5 years of age, use saline rinse and a neti pot. Elevating the head of the bed can help.
- For sore throat relief, give warm liquids (chicken broth/lemon and honey) for children > 1 yr and lozenges (i.e. chloraseptic, sucrets) for children over 4 years of age.
- For cough, make sure the child is drinking plenty of fluids and resting; taking a steamy shower with the child in the morning and night can help; you can use cough drops for children over 4 years of age. If the air in your home is dry, use a humidifier in the child's room. Also, elevating the head of the bed can help.

**Should my child get the seasonal flu vaccine? Yes.**

All children age 6 months to 18 years of age- especially younger children and children with asthma, heart disease, chronic medical conditions and those who are immunocompromised should receive this vaccine.

**Should my child get the novel influenza (H1N1) vaccine? Yes.**

The CDC has designated several high-risk groups who should receive priority for vaccination:

- Pregnant women
- Children and young adults aged 6 months to 24 years
- Adults aged 25 to 64 years who have medical conditions that put them at higher risk for influenza-related complications
- Caregivers (i.e. parents, nannies, etc.) and household contacts of infants younger than 6 months of age
- Healthcare workers and emergency medical service personnel

The vaccine has a similar safety profile as the seasonal flu vaccines and is made by the exact same process as the seasonal flu vaccines are made every year. Please check the CDC website [www.cdc.gov/H1N1flu](http://www.cdc.gov/H1N1flu) for the most up to date information.