

# Important Flu Facts

## TESTING

According to the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, it isn't necessary or feasible to test every person with influenza-like illness for H1N1 (formerly called the swine flu). Most people recover from the flu without needing medical treatment. People with flu-like symptoms who are not at high risk for influenza complications do NOT need to be seen by a doctor and do NOT need to be tested for H1N1. Doctors may decide to test specific individuals based on their evaluation of that person's particular illness.

## SYMPTOMS

Flu symptoms can include:

- Fever
- Sore throat
- Chills
- Cough
- Body aches
- Diarrhea
- Congestion
- Headache
- Fatigue
- Vomiting

## MEDICAL TREATMENT

Anti-viral medications do not "cure" the flu. These medications can shorten the length of an illness, although it can take a couple days for the medication to take effect.

Infectious disease experts worry that H1N1 flu will become resistant to anti-viral medications if those drugs are overused. Accordingly, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends against treating flu with anti-viral medications unless an individual is at a higher risk for developing serious complications from the flu.

Those high-risk groups are:

- People hospitalized with confirmed, probable or suspected H1N1 flu.
- Children younger than 5 years old. The risk for severe complications from seasonal influenza is highest among children younger than 2 years old.
- Adults 65 years of age and older.
- Persons with the following conditions:
  - Chronic pulmonary (including asthma), cardiovascular (except hypertension), renal, hepatic, hematological (including sickle cell disease), neurologic, neuromuscular, or metabolic disorders (including diabetes mellitus)
  - Immunosuppression, including that caused by medications or HIV
  - Pregnant women
  - Persons younger than 19 years of age who are receiving long-term aspirin therapy
  - Residents of nursing homes and other chronic-care facilities.

If you belong to one of these high-risk groups and think you have the flu, contact your doctor.

## HOME TREATMENT

Most people recover from the flu without needing medical treatment. You'll feel sick for 7-10 days. Please stay home—you'll feel better and you won't infect your friends, co-workers or fellow students.

During that time, you should get plenty of rest and drink lots of clear fluids (water, broth, sports drinks, electrolyte beverages for infants) to keep from becoming dehydrated. Be sure to cover coughs and sneezes.

Take medications as needed for fever and pain. These include acetaminophen (Tylenol®) and ibuprofen (Advil®, Motrin®, Nuprin®), and cough medicine. Carefully follow the dosing instructions on the labels. These medicines do not need to be taken regularly if your symptoms improve.

Do not give aspirin (acetylsalicylic acid) or products containing aspirin (e.g. Pepto Bismol®) to children younger than 19 years of age.

Do not give children younger than 4 years of age any over-the-counter cold medications without first speaking with a health care provider.

Clean your hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub often—especially after using tissues and after coughing or sneezing into your hands. You can help your loved ones avoid the flu by wearing a facemask when other people are in the same room.

## GOING BACK TO SCHOOL OR WORK

Most people can go back to work or school 24 hours after your fever is gone (without the use of fever-reducing medicines).

Health care personnel should stay away from work for seven days from the start of their illness, or until symptoms have disappeared, whichever is longer. You should use this same criteria if you work with or around people in one of the high-risk groups for developing complications from the flu.

## VACCINES

While there is not expected to be a shortage of H1N1 vaccine, the CDC has recommended that certain groups have first priority for receiving the vaccine when it initially becomes available: 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.

The CDC has recommended that vaccination programs be expanded more broadly once these groups have been taken care of.

## MORE INFORMATION IS AVAILABLE

The hospital's website has links to several helpful websites that can provide the latest information on the flu. Go to [www.bch.org](http://www.bch.org) and click on Flu Update.