

## What is influenza?

Influenza is an infectious illness caused by a virus. It is primarily spread from person to person by the aerosol route, via inhalation of droplets formed during coughing and sneezing, or by direct contact with articles contaminated with respiratory secretions.

Influenza usually begins abruptly and can include fever, chills, fatigue, headache, muscle aches, non-productive cough, runny nose, sore throat and mild conjunctivitis. It is different from the common cold.

The influenza viruses that circulate in the community can change from year to year. Occasionally influenza viruses emerge that are completely new, and can cause global pandemics. This is what we have seen recently with Pandemic Influenza H1N1 2009 (swine flu). This virus is likely to again be the predominant strain in New Zealand in 2010.

The clinical definition of influenza includes the following criteria.

- Fever greater or equal to 38 °C
- At least one respiratory symptom - cough, sore throat, nasal symptoms such as a runny nose
- At least one systemic symptom - headache, myalgia (aches/pains), sweats/chills (feeling feverish), lethargy (fatigue).

## How can you catch influenza?

All strains of influenza, including Pandemic Influenza H1N1 2009 (swine flu), are spread in the community in the same way.

The main form of transmission is through the coughs or sneezes of an infected person. Infected droplets are released into the air and breathed in by others. However, these droplets do not remain in the air for long and generally only affect people within a two metre radius.

It is also possible to get influenza by touching contaminated surfaces, and then touching your nose, mouth or eyes.

Chlorine in drinking water makes it very unlikely that you will get influenza from drinking water or swimming in chlorinated pools.

Even though it is sometimes called swine flu, the new Pandemic Influenza H1N1 2009 virus is not spread by eating cooked pork or handling raw pork products.

Good hygiene practices such as covering your coughs and sneezes, hand washing with soap and water followed by drying them thoroughly, staying away from sick people and from others if you are ill, are important things you can do to stop the spread and limit your exposure to influenza viruses.

## Signs and symptoms of Influenza can include:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• fever (a temperature <math>\geq 38</math> °C)</li><li>• cough</li><li>• sore throat</li><li>• runny or stuffy nose</li><li>• body aches</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• headache</li><li>• chills</li><li>• fatigue</li><li>• Some people also experience diarrhoea and vomiting.</li></ul>
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When somebody has influenza:

- the worst symptoms usually last about five days, but coughing can last up to two to three weeks
- some very young children, people with some long-term medical conditions, pregnant women, and older people, can get very sick
- in rare instances severe illness and death can occur.

## **Who is at risk of complications?**

People who have a greater chance of developing serious influenza complications include:

- Children younger than two years old\*
- Adults 65 years and older
- Pregnant women
- People with certain chronic medical conditions (such as asthma, heart failure, chronic lung disease) and people with a weak immune system (such as diabetes, HIV)
- People who are morbidly obese
- People younger than 19 years of age who are receiving long-term aspirin therapy.

\*It is also important to know that children aged two to four also have a higher rate of complications compared to older children, although the risk for these children is lower than the risk for children younger than two years.

## ***I'm pregnant, why am I at higher risk from Pandemic Influenza H1N1 2009 (swine flu)?***

You are at higher risk because studies have shown that all pregnant women are at greater risk from complications associated with influenza illness, from both Pandemic Influenza and other influenza strains.

Furthermore influenza vaccination of pregnant women has been shown to decrease the incidence of influenza in their new-born babies.

Pregnant women with coexisting medical conditions such as asthma or diabetes are at even greater risk of severe influenza-related illness, with a three to four times higher risk of having severe influenza.

Maternal influenza infection has been associated with an increased risk of maternal hospitalisation, foetal malformations and other illnesses.

Influenza infection in young infants often prompts hospitalisation and can predispose infants to pneumonia or ear infections.

## Protecting Yourself and Others:

<p><b>Get an Influenza Vaccination</b></p>	<p>Contact your doctor to discuss getting an influenza vaccination. 70% of people that receive an influenza vaccination will not get influenza, the other 30% might get mild symptoms but reduce the risk of complications and duration of illness</p>
<p><b>Wash and dry your hands frequently</b></p>	<p>Wash your hands for at least 20 seconds and dry them for 20 seconds, or use an alcohol-based hand rub.</p> <p>Wash your hands before preparing food and eating or smoking; after coughing, sneezing, wiping children's noses, visiting the toilet or changing nappies.</p>
<p><b>Cover your coughs and sneezes</b></p>	<p>Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze and put your used tissue in a bin (if you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve – not your hands). Remember to wash your hands afterwards.</p> <p>Avoid touching your nose, mouth or eyes. Germs spread that way.</p>
<p><b>Stay away from other people if you or they are sick</b></p>	<p>Try to stay a metre away from sick people to reduce the spread of germs. If you become unwell, stay away from other people.</p> <p>Reduce time spent in crowded settings.</p>
<p><b>Contamination and cleaning</b></p>	<p>Regularly clean flat surfaces such as bathroom sinks, bedside cabinets, desks and table tops where germs can live for up to 48 hours. Wipe them down with a household disinfectant.</p> <p>Take care with items in your home that may carry infection and can help stop its spread.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Throw away tissues and other disposable items used by the sick person. Wash your hands after touching used tissues and similar waste.</li> <li>• Keep surfaces (especially bedside tables, surfaces in the bathroom, and toys for children) clean by wiping them down with a household disinfectant.</li> <li>• Linen, eating utensils, and dishes belonging to those who are sick do not need to be cleaned separately, but should not be shared without washing them thoroughly first.</li> <li>• Wash linen (such as bed sheets and towels) by using household laundry soap and, if possible, tumble dry them on a hot setting. Clean your hands with soap and water or alcohol-based hand rub right after handling dirty laundry.</li> <li>• Eating utensils should be washed either in a dishwasher or by hand with hot water and soap.</li> </ul>
<p><b>If you've got flu symptoms</b></p>	<p>Here are some tips to help your recovery and prevent the spread of influenza to others:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>stay home</b> until you are essentially well or until sneezing and coughing are under control (This is usually around three to four days after symptoms start, but coughing may last up to two or three weeks).</li> <li>• <b>Let a relative or friend know</b> if you are at home alone</li> <li>• <b>Use tissues to blow your nose</b> and dispose of these into a plastic bag. Don't leave them sitting round for others to pick up.</li> <li>• <b>rest</b> in a separate room that has good ventilation and is away from other members of the household</li> <li>• <b>don't share</b> anything that may spread flu</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>drink</b> small amounts of fluids (but not alcohol) often and keep your mouth clean and moist by cleaning teeth regularly</li> <li>• <b>take drugs</b> that relieve pain and fever, e.g., paracetamol or ibuprofen. (Aspirin-type medications should not be used for children and young people.)</li> <li>• <b>gargle</b> with a glass of warm water and/or suck on sugarless hard sweets or lozenges for sore throats</li> <li>• keep bedding and nightwear <b>clean and dry</b> if you are in bed</li> <li>• <b>shower or bath regularly</b>, or use a cloth to wash with warm water and soap</li> <li>• <b>wash your hands thoroughly</b> (for at least 20 seconds) <b>and often</b>, drying them well afterwards or use an antiseptic hand rub</li> <li>• <b>apply skin balm or moisturiser</b> to prevent your lips, nose and surrounding skin from drying out and cracking.</li> </ul> <p><b>Phone your doctor within 48 hours of getting influenza symptoms as antiviral medication may help you.</b></p> <p>Pandemic influenza H1N1 2009 (swine flu) can be treated with antiviral drugs, such as Tamiflu. Antiviral drugs are prescription medicines that fight against influenza by keeping viruses from reproducing in your body. They make your illness milder and make you feel better, faster. They may also help stop serious influenza complications.</p>
<p><b>If your condition worsens</b></p>	<p><b>Seek medical advice by phoning your doctor or Health line 0800 61 1 116</b></p> <p>Here are some signs to look for. The ill person</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• starts to feel better, then gets worse</li> <li>• has a temperature of 38°C or greater</li> <li>• Is drowsy or difficult to rouse</li> <li>• has chills or severe shaking</li> <li>• has difficulty breathing or chest pain</li> <li>• Is coughing blood or green phlegm</li> <li>• has purple or blue discolouration of the lips</li> <li>• is less responsive than normal, is unusually quiet, or becomes confused</li> <li>• is vomiting and unable to keep liquids down</li> <li>• has signs of dehydration such as dizziness when standing, not urinating, and in infants, a lack of tears when they cry</li> <li>• has seizures or convulsions.</li> </ul> <p>If you don't get better after a week or you suddenly feel much worse you should seek advice.</p>
<p><b>Get medical advice if you have a serious condition</b></p>	<p>People at particular risk who should phone their GP or Healthline if they get influenza include pregnant women, and adults and children with respiratory disease, asthma, pneumonia, heart disease, liver disease, neurological conditions, immunosuppression or blood disorders.</p>

Reference: <http://www.moh.govt.nz/moh.nsf/indexmh/influenza-a-h1n1-questions#catch>