



The Johns Hopkins Office of Critical  
Event Preparedness and Response

## H1N1 Flu Safety

Questions and Answers for Johns Hopkins Medicine Employees and Faculty Members

**Q: What is H1N1 (swine) flu?**

A: H1N1 flu is caused by an influenza virus. Four types of H1N1 flu virus exist and regularly cause respiratory disease in pigs, with many cases among the animals but few deaths. Flu viruses also infect many other mammals, as well as birds. These viruses are related to the ones that cause influenza in humans, but the various animal flu viruses tend to remain in their “host” species.

**Q: How does H1N1 flu infect humans?**

A: In the past, occasional cases have been reported of the H1N1 flu virus infecting humans. This is rare because H1N1 flu viruses don’t easily attach to the cells of human throats and lungs. When it does happen, those most often infected are involved in farming or have had direct contact with infected pigs at, say, pork processing plants or livestock exhibitions. The H1N1 flu then can be passed from one human to another through sneezing, coughing or by touching an infected person or surface and then touching your nose or mouth.

**Q: Can you get H1N1 flu from eating pork from an infected pig?**

A: No. The World Health Organization (WHO) says the H1N1 influenza virus is killed by cooking temperatures of 160 degrees Fahrenheit, which means that cooking pork properly and thoroughly makes it safe to eat.

**Q: How often do humans become infected with H1N1 flu?**

A: In the past, the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) received very few reports of H1N1 flu infecting humans in the United States. Until the recent outbreak in Mexico and the apparently related ones in this country, only 12 cases of human H1N1 flu had been reported in the United States between December 2005 and

February 2009. However, the WHO notes that mild cases or ones without typical symptoms could have escaped detection, so the true extent of H1N1 flu among humans is unknown.

**Q: What are the symptoms of H1N1 flu?**

A: H1N1 flu symptoms are similar to the symptoms of regular human flu and include:

- fever of more than 100 degrees Fahrenheit
- runny nose
- nasal congestion
- sore throat or cough

**Q: What should I do if I have flu symptoms?**

A: Any employee with a fever of more than 100 degrees Fahrenheit and one upper-respiratory symptom (**runny nose, nasal congestion, sore throat or cough**) who has not traveled to a high-risk area or a place with reported outbreaks must do all of the following:

- notify his or her supervisor
- stay home from work until he or she has had no fever for at least 48 hours
- call Occupational Health Services (OHS) to be screened and receive guidance about any further restrictions
- be approved to return to work by OHS

**Q: What should I do if I have flu symptoms and have returned from a high-risk area or a place with a reported outbreak?**

A: Any employee returning from a high-risk area or a place with reported outbreaks who has a fever of greater than 100 degrees Fahrenheit and one upper-respiratory symptom (**runny nose, nasal congestion, sore throat or cough**) must do all of the following:

- notify his or her supervisor
- call OHS immediately to schedule a screening
- receive guidance from OHS regarding next steps
- be approved to return to work by OHS

**Q: What should I do if I visited a high-risk area or a place with a reported outbreak, but I have no flu symptoms?**

A: Any employee who has visited a high-risk area and thinks he or she has been exposed to H1N1 flu s must do all of the following:

- notify his or her supervisor
- call OHS immediately for screening

- be approved to return to work by OHS

**Q: If I have a confirmed case of H1N1, what leave am I required to use?**

A: Employees who take time away from work due to flu are expected to take sick leave, paid time off (PTO) or vacation time to cover their time off, following policies appropriate for their organization (JHHS or JHUSOM).

**Q: How does H1N1 flu differ from regular seasonal flu?**

A: H1N1 flu can cause more severe vomiting and diarrhea. In rare cases, it can attack the lungs, which might be fatal. The current H1N1 flu outbreak also involves a strain that is new, so people have no natural immunity to it, unlike the seasonal flu.

**Q: Will the flu shots we got last fall help protect us?**

A: The World Health Organization says it isn't known if the current human seasonal influenza vaccines provide any protection against the new H1N1 flu virus. Officials from the CDC believe there is no "cross-reaction" between last fall's seasonal vaccine and the new H1N1 flu virus, although the seasonal flu vaccine may provide partial protection against at least one other strain of the H1N1 flu virus.

**Q: How can we avoid getting—or spreading—H1N1 flu?**

A: As during the regular flu season, the following precautions can reduce the risk of getting or spreading H1N1 flu:

- 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 (such as Purell) are also effective.
- To help prevent spreading germs, avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread that way.
- Actively monitor your own health, as well as the health of your family and friends. Call your health care provider if, and as soon as, flulike symptoms appear: a fever of more than 100 degrees Fahrenheit, runny nose, nasal congestion, sore throat or cough.
- Report any respiratory illness with flulike symptoms (as noted above) if you have traveled to states bordering Mexico or have had contact with a known H1N1 flu case.