

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT SWINE FLU (H1N1)

What is H1N1? And why is it getting so much attention?

H1N1 (referred to as “swine flu”) is a new virus that was first detected in the US in April of 2009. This virus is spreading from person to person world wide, and unlike the regular flu, it has not gone away over the summer months. In fact, it has become more wide spread. The reason it is referred to as “swine flu” is that it has two genes that are very similar to an influenza virus that occurs in pigs, as well as birds and humans.

The reason for its world wide attention, is that unlike the regular flu, it seems to be affecting the school age population more so than the regular seasonal flu. The death rate from the H1N1 in the school age population (5-22 years old) is 45%, compared to only 3% with the regular flu. The seasonal flu is the cause for over 90% deaths in the elderly population (>65 years old) compared to about 5% for H1N1. The reason for this is thought to be the close contact the children have in schools and universities.

How does the H1N1 virus spread?

Spread of the 2009 H1N1 virus is thought to occur in the same way the seasonal flu is spread, which is through human contact. Flu viruses are spread from person to person through coughing or sneezing by people with the influenza. People may also become infected by touching something, such as a surface or object with the virus on it and then touching their mouth or nose. It is unknown how long the virus lives outside the body, but is it estimated to be about 2-10 hours.

What are the signs and symptoms of H1N1 and how does it compare to the seasonal flu in severity?

The symptoms of the H1N1 flu can vary from mild to severe, just like the seasonal flu. The typical symptoms of H1N1 include fever, cough, sore throat, runny nose, body aches, headaches, chills and fatigue. Some people may also have vomiting and diarrhea. There is a wide spectrum of symptoms which range from mild to severe.

With the seasonal flu, certain people are considered “high risk” for severe complications. This includes people who are 65 years or older, children younger than five, pregnant women, and those with certain medical conditions. This is a drastic difference to the H1N1 influenza as those over 65 do not seem to be affected, but rather the 5-22 year old age group are widely affected.

How long can an infected person spread the virus to others?

People infected with the seasonal flu and H1N1 shed the virus and may be able to infect others from 1 day before being sick to 7 days after symptoms have started.

What can I do to protect myself and my children from getting sick?

This year more than ever, we need to set up routines at home. Practicing and reiterating these habits at home is STEP ONE in prevention.

- Washing hands before eating, after using the bathroom and anytime you cough or sneeze. OR using an alcohol based hand rub.
- Coughing/sneezing into your elbow instead of your hands reduces the spread of the virus.
- Disposing of tissues properly after their use.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way!

And most importantly, please do not send your child to school when ill. This year more than ever, the CDC strongly recommends that your child stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone. (The fever should be gone without the use of fever reducing medication)

This is going to be a very important way to prevent the spread of sickness in our school. If there is any doubt that your child is not well, please keep him/her home for observation.

If your child is ill, and you are concerned, please call your physician immediately.

There will also be an immunization available to all the beginning of November. There will be one day set aside where every one will have the opportunity to receive this immunization. If you have any questions about it, please consult with your physician.

Our goal at the Nantucket New School is that everyone like you, your child and your teachers and staff remain healthy this winter!

Eat a healthy diet full of fruits and vegetables, limit sweets and junk food and get plenty of rest. These things have been proven to help your child maintain a healthy immune system and keep them happy and healthy all winter long!