



INYO COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH BRIEF

A Division of Health & Human Services
Richard O. Johnson, M.D., MPH
Public Health Officer, Inyo County
760-914-0496
drerrickjohn@gmail.com



Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

October 12, 2009

H1N1 Influenza – The Surge is On!

All reports from across the country now agree that an unusually early start to the fall-winter influenza season is underway - with a vengeance. 37 states are reporting widespread influenza activity, 99% of which is the 2009 H1N1 novel influenza virus. The proportion of outpatient visits is above epidemic levels, and hospitalizations and deaths are at epidemic thresholds, much like we usually see in mid-February. There have been 20 deaths among children in California since the H1N1 infections started last spring. In the US, there were 19 pediatric deaths in the last reporting week alone. The burden of severe illness continues to fall on the young. Indicators in the Eastern Sierra also show increased activity. Since we are usually two weeks behind urban areas, things are sure to get worse before they get better.

Here are some questions (and answers) that we are being asked frequently:

Does everyone with the flu need to see a healthcare provider or get tested and treated?

Most children and adults with the flu who are generally in good health will recover **without** needing to visit a healthcare provider. Some people may want to **call** their healthcare provider for advice on how to care for the flu at home.

I think I have the flu. Can I get tested to see if I have the “swine” flu?

Testing is not needed or recommended for most children and adults who get the flu. **Testing** is only being done on individuals who are hospitalized with influenza or pneumonia, who died from an illness suspected to be influenza, or when making a diagnosis would influence the treatment of close contacts who may be at high risk of complications if they got sick.

What about **medicine** for treatment or prevention?

Antiviral medication is not currently recommended except for people with the flu who are very sick, or at higher risk for complications, and for persons having contact with high risk persons. Most healthy people with flu, however, do not need to be treated with antiviral drugs. When used for treatment, these drugs can make you feel better and shorten the time that you are sick by one day if given early in the illness. They can also help to prevent complications. The most commonly used drug is Tamiflu, which commonly causes nausea and vomiting. Persons taking these drugs should be closely monitored for signs of unusual

behavior or problems thinking clearly.

Who needs to call or visit a healthcare provider?

Children and adults who are ill and at high risk for flu complications and people with more severe flu symptoms should call their regular healthcare provider or go to an emergency department if they cannot reach their healthcare provider. Whenever possible, **call your healthcare provider** to get advice on whether you need to be seen. Please do not go to an emergency department unless you have severe symptoms or a chronic condition that makes you at higher risk for flu complications and you cannot contact your healthcare provider.

General advice if you think you have the flu

If you are sick with the flu, you may be ill for a week or longer. Please stay home, except if you need medical care or other necessities, so you can get better and prevent others from getting ill. Drink plenty of fluids and rest as much as possible. Avoid travel. Do not go to work or school until at least 24 hours after your fever is gone. Your fever should be gone without the use of fever-reducing medicine like acetaminophen (Tylenol) and ibuprofen (Motrin/Advil). If you leave the house to seek medical care, wear a facemask. Wash your hands frequently with warm water and soap or use a hand sanitizer. Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue or the sleeve of your elbow. In general, avoid contact with other people as much as possible to keep from spreading your illness, especially those with one of the high-risk chronic conditions listed below.

Who is at increased risk for flu complications?

People at increased risk for flu complications are:

- Children younger than 5 years old – particularly children younger than 2 years old, for whom the risk for severe complications from seasonal influenza is highest.
- Adults 65 years of age or older for seasonal flu, and individuals less than 60 for the H1N1 influenza.
- Pregnant women
- Persons with the following conditions:
 - o Chronic diseases of the lung (including asthma), heart (except hypertension), kidney, liver, blood (including sickle cell disease), brain or nervous system, muscles (particularly those that cause difficulty with swallowing), or metabolism (including diabetes mellitus);
 - o Immunosuppression (weakened immune system) including that caused by medications or by HIV;
 - o Persons younger than 19 years of age who are receiving long-term aspirin therapy, because of an increased risk for

- Reye syndrome.
- Persons with obesity (especially for the H1N1 influenza)

When should I see a healthcare provider right away?

If you become ill and experience any of the following warning signs, go to your healthcare provider or emergency room immediately.

For children, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish or gray skin color (call 911 immediately)
- 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

For adults, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough

Don't forget, to keep from getting sick, get vaccinated, and follow the usual important instructions of washing your hands and staying home when you are sick.

More information, especially about both seasonal and H1N1 influenza vaccine, is available at:

Public Health – Inyo County:

<http://www.inyocounty.us/publichealth/index.php>

760-873-7868 (English and Spanish)

U.S. Government

www.flu.gov

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):

<http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/>

California Department of Public Health:

<http://www.cdph.ca.gov/HealthInfo/discond/Pages/SwineInfluenza.aspx>