

H1N1 Family Preparedness

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As we head into the fall and winter flu season, families are faced with concerns about not only seasonal influenza, but also the novel H1N1 influenza virus. Novel H1N1 influenza, which has been spreading from person to person since its emergence this spring, has been declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization. The United States may experience a resurgence of H1N1 during this year's flu season. While it is impossible to know in advance how the novel H1N1 virus will affect the nation this fall, family preparedness can help slow the spread of the virus and keep Wisconsin families healthy.

Information about H1N1 in Wisconsin can be found on the websites of county and state public health departments. The Wisconsin Department of Health Services' H1N1 website is <http://pandemic.wisconsin.gov>, which also provides information in Spanish and Hmong. A list of contact information for county health departments can be found at <http://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/localhealth>. To get Wisconsin flu information by phone, dial 2-1-1 to connect with area health and human services resources. If you experience problems reaching 2-1-1, dial (877)-947-2211.

The <http://pandemic.wisconsin.gov> website suggests ways to keep family members healthy and to prepare for flu pandemics. Of particular interest is the "Pandemic Influenza Toolkit for Families," which includes information about proper handwashing and other ways to prevent the spread of influenza, how to care for sick family members, and ways to prepare your household for a pandemic (including maintaining supplies of food, water, and medications in the home). These preventative measures are effective against both novel H1N1 flu and seasonal flu. The toolkit document also includes a "Pandemic Preparedness Quiz" that can be used to assess your family's readiness for pandemic influenza.

To learn more about the latest developments with H1N1 in the U.S., the federal government provides information (available in both Spanish and English) at <http://www.flu.gov> and <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu>, or by phone at 800-CDC-INFO (800- 232-4636).

In addition to individual measures like covering your cough, washing hands properly, and staying home while sick, the distribution of a vaccine against novel H1N1 influenza will be an important tool in preventing the spread of the virus. The U.S. government is working with companies to manufacture a safe and effective H1N1 vaccine, and hopes to have the first set of doses ready this fall. If initial doses are limited, certain at-risk groups will have first priority in receiving the vaccine, including health-care workers, pregnant women, caregivers of infants, children and young adults 6 months to 24 years of age, and people under 65 with certain underlying medical conditions. Individuals that receive the H1N1 vaccine will still be at risk for the seasonal flu and will need to get a separate seasonal flu vaccine. Information about who should be vaccinated against the seasonal flu can be obtained at: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/keyfacts.htm>.

State and local health departments are working to develop plans for use of an H1N1 vaccine this fall and will be able to update the public as more vaccine information becomes available. However, since epidemics of H1N1 may begin before the vaccine is available, preventative measures by families (such as those outlined in the "Pandemic Influenza Toolkit") are essential.

If you experience flu-like symptoms, including "fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue" (CDC), you should stay home from school or work until at least 24 hours after your fever is gone. If leaving the home to seek medical attention, cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue (or your upper sleeve if one is not available) and wear a facemask if possible. Those who are severely ill or who have a greater risk of complications, including young children, the elderly, pregnant women, and people with underlying chronic medical conditions, should contact their health care provider. More detailed information about what to do if you or a family member is sick can be obtained at <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/sick.htm>.