



## Parent Tips - H1N1 (Swine) Flu

*Revised August 6, 2009*

### What is the H1N1 flu (swine flu)?

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the H1N1 (swine) flu is a type of influenza (flu) virus that causes respiratory disease that can spread between people.

### What are the symptoms?

In most children, the symptoms of H1N1 (swine) flu are similar to the symptoms of regular flu. They include: fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue, and occasionally vomiting and diarrhea. Parents and caregivers should monitor their children every morning for symptoms of influenza-like illness. H1N1 flu (swine flu) cannot be obtained by eating pork or any pork product.

### How do I protect my family from getting the H1N1 (swine) flu?

It is important for parents and caregivers to remember to take care of their own health in order to avoid getting sick themselves and introducing the virus to their family.

Parents and their children should take common-sense measures to protect against contracting and spreading the flu. These measures include avoiding close contact with people who are sick, staying home when you are sick to help prevent others from catching your illness, covering your mouth or nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing, cleaning your hands often, avoiding touching your eyes, nose, or mouth, and practicing other good health habits such as getting plenty of rest and eating healthy food.

### How do I talk to my child about the H1N1 (swine) flu?

Explain to children that this is another strain of the flu, but consider their age and maturity level. Try not to overwhelm them with information.

#### Suggested Approaches:

- **Maintain your composure.** Kids will worry if you act worried.
- **Talk about the flu in an age-appropriate manner.** Explain to children that this is another strain of the flu, but consider their age and maturity level and make sure not to overwhelm them.
- **Be patient.** It's common for children to ask the same questions over and over.
- **Help children to express their concerns.** Encourage children to share what they are thinking, their concerns, and questions. Find creative ways of communicating, such as through art, writing, or music.
- **Listen.** Ask questions. Find out what your children know about the situation. Make sure they understand the facts, and discuss what they've seen or heard.

- **Make yourself available.** Your children may need extra attention from you. Make time for them.
- **Tell your children you love them, and offer plenty of hugs and kisses.** Maintain a strong level of affection in your home to help children feel calm.

### **What are some key topics parents should communicate to their children?**

There are things we can do to stay healthy and avoid spreading disease, such as washing your hands, covering your mouths with a tissue when you sneeze or cough, and staying home when you don't feel well.

It is important that all students treat each other with respect and not jump to conclusions about who may or may not have the flu.

### **What are the resources available in my community to support parents?**

A Parent Teacher Association® (PTA), school nurse, school psychologist, school counselor or school social worker can be helpful resources to parents. Talk to your school nurse, school psychologist, school counselor, or school social worker if your child is having difficulties as a result of anxiety or stress-related to the flu. Parents should speak with a school principal regarding a potential school closure.

### **Will schools continue to be closed?**

Unless there is a large number of student and staff absenteeism at a school that interferes with their ability to function, the CDC does not recommend school closure as an effective way to prevent the spread of the virus. Instead, they are asking schools and child care facilities promote preventative behaviors, such as hand-washing and avoiding contact with the virus. The CDC also recommends the early identification of ill students and staff and encouraging sick students and staff to stay home. Those with influenza-like illness should stay home (or be sent home) until at least 24 hours after his fever has subsided (without the use of fever-reducing medications). Children who are sick should be kept at home and away from others as much as possible.

### **Where can I go for further information?**

- National Parent Teacher Association: [www.pta.org](http://www.pta.org)
- U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: [www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu](http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu)
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: [www.hhs.gov](http://www.hhs.gov)
- U.S. Department of Education: [www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov)

*Sources –U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Center for Disease Control, National Association of School Psychologists, and National Association of School Nurses.*