

H1N1 in Plain Language

I'm a healthy person, should I worry?

If you were born after 1975, you have no immunity to the H1N1 virus, otherwise known as Swine Flu. It is hitting young people the hardest, and although H1N1 does not appear as lethal as first feared it will make you very sick. You will have a fever and chills, your body will ache, and some people also experience diarrhea and vomiting.

Until you are without fever for twenty-four-hours, you will miss school, sports practice, concert and play rehearsals, and all the other activities you enjoy. You will also put your friends and family at risk.

What should I do to stay healthy?

Frequent thorough hand washing, keeping some distance from those who have cold and flu symptoms, eating well and getting enough rest will help a lot. The H1N1 vaccine will also protect you from this strain of the flu.

I never get a flu shot before, why should I consider one now?

You are at greater risk for H1N1. The usual seasonal flu affects the very young, the elderly, and people with ongoing health problems. The H1N1 virus is disproportionately affecting young healthy people.

Is the new vaccine safe?

Yes. It was thoroughly tested in clinical trials before the FDA approved the vaccine. The process of creating this vaccine is exactly the same as the one used every year for the seasonal vaccine.

Does the vaccine always work?

In healthy people seasonal flu shots have reduced the chance of getting the flu by 70-90 percent. Those are pretty good odds compared with the consequences of getting H1N1.

The news about all this keeps changing; how can I keep up with it all?

In Westerns Massachusetts the local health departments and the Mohawk Area Public health Coalition (MAPCHO) are meeting often to stay informed and communicate the information people need to make informed decisions. Local newspapers, radio stations, and newsletters will offer tips to stay healthy and announce flu clinics when they are scheduled. Your family doctor is a good source for information and advice.

H1N1= No Fun

This virus is very unpleasant. It causes high fever, chills, muscle aches, and in some cases diarrhea and vomiting. Dehydration is a danger, especially among young children.

Though nothing can guarantee that you or your family will remain “Flu Prof,” frequent thorough hand washing, coughing and sneezing into ones elbow, and social distancing, along with good nutrition and adequate rest can help you stay well.

The recently approved H1N1 vaccine will offer additional protection. Season flu vaccines have, in the past, protected between 70 and 90 percent of the at-risk population.

The New Vaccine is Safe

The H1N1 vaccine was thoroughly tested in clinical trials before the FDA approved the vaccine. The process of creating this vaccine is exactly the same as the one used every year for the seasonal vaccine.

Getting vaccinated is entirely voluntary, and no child will receive the vaccine without parental permission.

Community Immunity is a Worthy Goal

Community immunity occurs only when a critical mass of people have been immunized. You can protect your family, friends and community; help stop the spread of H1N1 by getting vaccinated.

The H1N1 virus is disproportionately affecting people born *after* 1975. That’s a lot of people! Children and young people have no prior immunity that would allow them to fight this off. Pregnant women are most vulnerable.

Each infected person must stay at home for twenty-four hours after the fever has ended, and most cases of H1N1 last a week. The impact on family and community activities, and work will be significant if there is widespread infection.

Daily updates from the State can also be found at www.mass.gov/dph/flu