

About the H1N1 (Swine) Flu

Updated 3/11/09

We're not hearing much about the H1N1 flu anymore, which is good news. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, H1N1 activity peaked last October and has declined significantly. But that doesn't mean we're out of the woods yet. Flu cases often come in waves, and we could well see another wave at any time. That's why, if you haven't already gotten your H1N1 vaccine, it's not too late to do so.

The new H1N1 type of flu was first seen in the US in the spring of 2009. It kept infecting people during the summer, when flu is usually rare. A second wave of H1N1 swept the country from September until December. Unlike seasonal flu, H1N1 has been affecting mainly children and young adults. Scientists are not sure why older adults have not been getting it. They may have immunity from exposure to a similar flu decades ago.

Do older adults need the H1N1 flu shot? At first the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention asked that only high risk people such as children and pregnant women get the new H1N1 shot. But as more and more H1N1 vaccine has been made and sent around the US, it is now being offered to anyone who wants it.

We encourage everyone to get an H1N1 flu shot. Here's why: more people getting vaccinated means fewer people getting sick and passing the virus on to others. It is especially important for those with a

chronic condition such as asthma, COPD, diabetes or heart disease. Those are the people who are more likely to develop complications like pneumonia and end up in the hospital if they get the virus. Check with your doctor's office about getting your H1N1 shot. Most local health departments continue to offer the H1N1 vaccine and most of those locations offer them free of charge. Or put your zip code in the Flu Vaccine Locator at www.flu.gov for shot options in your area.

The Seasonal Flu

The regular (seasonal) flu rarely makes headlines but it can be just as dangerous. Every year the seasonal flu kills more people *each week* than the total number killed by the H1N1 this past spring. And unlike H1N1, seasonal flu affects older adults and people with chronic conditions. Who should get a seasonal flu shot?

- Everyone 50 years and older
- Everyone between the ages of 6 months and 19 years
- People with certain chronic medical conditions
- People who live in nursing homes or other long-term care facilities
- Pregnant women
- People who live with or care for those listed above

The seasonal flu shot is still available. Seasonal flu usually peaks in February and March and sometimes as late as April so getting the shot

now will still protect you. If you have not gotten your yearly, seasonal flu shot yet, check with your doctor's office about when and where you can get it.

While you're at it, make sure you've had your pneumovax, too. Pneumonia is a common, and deadly complication of flu in older adults, so protect yourself with this shot too. You only need the pneumonia shot once after age 65.

What You Can Do

In addition to getting the recommended shots, you can do a lot to stay well during flu season – and all year. Much of it is just common sense, but here is a quick reminder.

1. Stay away from sick people. Drop off some chicken soup to a sick friend if you like, but don't linger. Likewise, stay away from others if you're sick.
2. Cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing to limit the spread of viruses and other germs. If possible sneeze and cough into a tissue or your elbow. The fewer germs on your hands, the less you will spread them.
3. Wash your hands often and for 30 seconds with soap and hot water. Always wash before eating (even just snacks) and after using the bathroom.

4. Use alcohol-based hand sanitizers if you don't have access to soap and water.
5. Train yourself not to touch your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread fast when they contact these areas.
6. Keep your immune system strong with other healthy actions:
 - Get seven to eight hours of sleep
 - Drink plenty of fluids
 - Eat 5-plus servings of fruits and vegetables and choose whole grain breads and cereals
 - Get some form of physical activity most days of the week.

There is a lot of buzz about the H1N1 and general flu season this year. Make sure you're getting the facts and not the hype. We will keep the information on our website up-to-date. As always, if you have concerns or questions about your specific situation, please talk to your doctor. Or, if you have a concern after hours or on the weekend, remember the nurses at SCAN OnCall® are always available. Call toll-free: 1-800-793-1717. If you have other questions about flu shots and preventative care benefits, call SCAN Member Services. **1-800-559-3500**, 7:00 a.m.– 8:00 p.m, 7 Days a Week. TTY: Users: **1-800-735-2929**. Or to contact us online [click here](#).