

INFORMATION FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES ABOUT H1N1 VIRUS

The World Health Organization has declared the H1N1 virus outbreak (2009) to be a Level 6 Pandemic. As the threat of further spread of this disease continues, people should take precautionary actions in order to avoid risks associated with the virus. People with disabilities and chronic health conditions, particularly those with compromised respiratory function or immune deficiencies, should pay particular attention to warnings by public health officials, and should make every effort to avoid infection by the virus.

Anyone who has chronic breathing problems, or a history of respiratory infection, should protect themselves from any flu-like virus, because such viral infections frequently cause severe complications. If respiratory function is already compromised by illness, disability or chronic condition, symptoms coincident with H1N1 virus can be very severe. Additionally, certain medications which may be prescribed for treatment of non-flu illnesses may affect respiratory function, and thereby may compound risks associated with having the H1N1 virus.

Anyone who has an immune deficiency, either chronic or acute, should take extra safety measures to avoid the H1N1 virus. People who are receiving medications associated with treatment of cancer, with recovery from organ transplants, or for other reasons are at great risk of having severe complications from flu viruses, including H1N1 virus. Fever and respiratory distress sometimes associated with treatment and recovery may be compounded by the H1N1 virus, and may become severe.

People with disabilities or chronic conditions who are taking medications which are immune-suppressive or which may have immune-suppressive side effects should be aware that any contact with or exposure to the H1N1 virus puts them at high risk of acquiring the virus. Such medications are often prescribed to people with rheumatic conditions and other systemic illnesses.

People with disabilities and chronic health conditions should follow all directions given by public health officials to avoid contracting the H1N1 virus. In addition to avoiding contact with people who may have flu-like symptoms, frequent hand washing, and covering ones mouth and nose when sneezing, the following extra measures should be taken by people who are at greatest risk of having complications from the flu as a result of pre existing conditions:

Prepare to stay at home for an extended period of time while people who are contagious from the virus may be in public places. Such preparation requires stocking plenty of nonperishable food, as well as fruits, vegetables and dairy products which can be refrigerated or which will stay fresh for a few days. Prescriptions should be refilled, if they can be, and any other medical or personal supplies should be stocked in sufficient quantities to enable a person to stay at home for a week or more, when authorities report high infection levels in the community.

For persons who require home health or other assistance on a regular or daily basis, make providers aware of complications which may result from contraction of the H1N1 virus. Also provide latex or non latex gloves and masks at the doorway for anyone coming into the home to use. Contagious diseases, like flu, are often spread by healthcare workers and others who are exposed to these diseases in one place and carry them to another. Preventive measures should be taken both by healthcare workers and by those whom they are assisting. Family members who come in and out of the home should be asked to take similar actions. People who have respiratory conditions should consult their physician before using masks, as masks may impair breathing and cause additional respiratory complications.

People with chronic conditions and disabilities who have any of the conditions mentioned above or who are taking medications which may affect breathing should consult with their physician about

additional measures which should be taken to avoid the H1N1 virus. Anyone with a disability or chronic condition who exhibits symptoms or feels that they may have been exposed to the H1N1 virus should consult their physician.

Related information can be found on the internet:

- http://www.who.int/csr/disease/swineflu/frequently_asked_questions/what/en/index.html An advisory for individuals published by the World Health Organization, Geneva, Switzerland. This page links back to the WHO website: Pandemic (H1N1) 2009.
- <http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/>. The latest information from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control about H1N1 Flu, including activities currently underway to deal with the situation, daily updates on affected areas and numbers of cases, and precautions you can take to protect yourself and your family: You may also contact the CDC at 800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636) English/Spanish TTY: (888) 232-6348, 24 Hours/Every Day – cdcinfo@cdc.gov.
- <http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/healthcare/homehealth.html> A report from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *Home Health Care During an Influenza Pandemic: Issues and Resources*, based on the findings of an expert panel meeting, including representatives of home health care, emergency and disaster planning, professional organizations and federal and state government agencies.
- http://www.astho.org/index.php?template=at_risk_population_project.html A website pertaining to at-risk groups. A report published by the U.S. Association for State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO), *At Risk Populations and Pandemic Influenza: Planning Guidance for State, Territorial, Tribal, and Local Health Departments*, is available here.

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g5t1r7yG7rM&feature=featured> A video Featuring Joseph Bresee, M.D., Chief of the Epidemiology & Prevention Branch in the U.S. Centers for Disease Control's Influenza Division. Dr. Breese tells what swine flu is, where it comes from, what the symptoms and treatments are and how long people with swine flu can be contagious. He gives information on what steps to take to avoid catching the virus, what to do if you think you have become infected, and warning signs that should lead you to seek emergency medical care. The video runs approximately 5 minutes. To start the captions, find the box at the far right on the bottom of the screen which has an arrow icon. It will give you a "CC" symbol on which to click.
- <http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publichealth/Flu/PandemicFlu/index.htm>
<http://www.moh.govt.nz/influenza-a-h1n1>
http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/alert-alerte/swine_200904-eng.php
http://www.nicd.nic.in/Tdr_CDA_Swine.pdf. Useful information about H1N1 virus from the governments of Britain, New Zealand, Canada, and India

NOTE: The information contained in this document was compiled and edited by Dr. Lex Frieden (lex.frieden@uth.tmc.edu) with contributions by Kim Dunn, MD and Gerard Francisco, MD (The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston, USA). This material is intended to be advisory and used only for informational and educational purposes. Individuals in need of personal medical advice or treatment should consult a licensed physician or health care provider.