

# 2009 H1N1 FLU

## Information for Veterans and VA Staff

OCTOBER 21, 2009

### What is the 2009 H1N1 flu?

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Photo credit: CDC

Like seasonal flu, the 2009 H1N1 flu is a respiratory illness caused by a flu virus. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has determined that 2009 H1N1 flu is contagious and is spreading from human to human. Because the 2009 H1N1 virus is new and spreads easily, the World Health Organization (WHO) has declared it to be a pandemic.

### How does the 2009 H1N1 flu spread?

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The 2009 H1N1 flu is thought to spread in the same way as seasonal flu.

When a person with the flu sneezes, coughs, talks, laughs, or even breathes, the flu virus can spread into the air in droplets from their mouth or nose. These droplets can spread to people and surfaces.

The flu virus may get on your hands if you touch anything that has the virus on it. If you then touch your eyes, nose, or mouth, you may get the flu.

### What are the signs and symptoms in people?

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The symptoms of the 2009 H1N1 flu are similar to the symptoms people have from seasonal flu. These are:

- fever
- cough
- sore throat
- body aches
- headache
- chills
- fatigue
- with the 2009 H1N1 flu, **some** people may have diarrhea and vomiting

### How can someone with the flu infect someone else?

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People with the flu may be able to infect others from 1 day before symptoms develop to 7 or more days after becoming sick. That means that you may be able to pass on the flu to someone else **before** you know you are sick, while you are sick, and for a short while afterwards.

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## WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it (then clean your hands).
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Keep yourself in good general health — get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids, and eat healthy food.
- Avoid close contact with sick people when you can.
- Be prepared in case you get sick and need to stay home for a week or so. Gather a supply of



medications, alcohol-based hand rubs, tissues, and other related items. Having these supplies handy helps you avoid leaving your home while you are sick and contagious.

- If you get sick with flu, CDC recommends that you stay home from work or school for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone.\* Limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.
- Keep informed about the 2009 H1N1 flu in your community — note school or workplace closings or restrictions on social gatherings.
- Get both your seasonal flu shot and the 2009 H1N1 flu shot.

*\* Health care workers who develop a febrile respiratory illness may need to stay home longer or change work duties. For details see [www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/guidelines\\_infection\\_control.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/guidelines_infection_control.htm).*

## Is there a vaccine for the 2009 H1N1 flu?

Yes. A vaccine to protect against the 2009 H1N1 flu has been made. Some supplies were distributed in October and will continue for the next few months. High-risk groups should get the 2009 H1N1 flu shot first. Then, as more vaccine is made, anyone who wants a 2009 H1N1 flu shot will be able to get one. To see who is in a high-risk group, go to [www.flu.gov/individualfamily/vaccination/index.html#priority](http://www.flu.gov/individualfamily/vaccination/index.html#priority).

VA will provide the 2009 H1N1 flu shots to VA staff, Veterans enrolled in VA health care, and some non-VA Federal health and emergency workers. These shots will be available in your community as well. Getting your seasonal flu shot will help protect you from seasonal flu. Getting the 2009 H1N1 flu shot will help protect you from the 2009 H1N1 flu. You need both shots to be protected.

## Where can I find more information?

Main U.S. Federal Web sites are [www.flu.gov](http://www.flu.gov) and [www.cdc.gov/h1n1](http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1)

VA Internet is [www.publichealth.va.gov](http://www.publichealth.va.gov)

VA intranet, for VA staff only, is [vawww.publichealth.va.gov](http://vawww.publichealth.va.gov)