



Howard County Flu Line – (410) 313-6503

www.hchealth.org

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H1N1 (Swine Flu): Important Information for Adult Day Care, Nursing Homes, and Long-Term Care Facilities

This document is up to date as of 9/08/2009 12:00:00 PM

The following information comes from the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

What is H1N1 (swine flu)?

H1N1 or swine flu is an illness caused by a new form of the flu virus. The virus is spreading from person-to-person just like the regular flu.

Are residents of nursing homes and group homes more likely to get sick?

Yes. H1N1 tends to be more severe in adults over 65 years of age and people with chronic medical conditions like asthma, diabetes, heart disease, and lung disease. Although rare, pneumonia and even death has been reported in people who get the flu.

How does H1N1 spread?

People with the flu can give you the virus if they cough or sneeze near you. You can also become sick by touching something with germs on it, such as door knobs, and then touching your eyes, mouth or nose. Unless they need urgent medical help, adults who are sick should be cared for at home.

What are the symptoms?

Fever and one or more of the following:

- Cough
- Sore throat
- Body aches
- Headache
- Chills and fatigue
- Sometimes vomiting and diarrhea

Is there a vaccine?

A vaccine to prevent H1N1 is still being tested. The best way to prevent the spread of H1N1 is by staying away from sick people, washing your hands often, and covering your cough.

What steps can I take to keep my residents healthy?

The flu spreads from person to person through the coughing or sneezing of a sick person. You can also become sick by touching something with germs on it, such as door knobs, and then touching your eyes, mouth or nose.

To help prevent the spread of germs and stay healthy, ask residents to:

- Avoid touching their eyes, nose and mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Drink plenty of clear fluids (such as water, broth, and sports drinks).
- Wash hands often with soap and warm water for 20 seconds. Alcohol-based gels like Purell also work and are good to use if soap and water are not available.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or the inside of your elbow when you cough or sneeze. Make sure to put your used tissue in the trash after one use.
- Stay in their room while they are sick and stay away from other people until at least 24 hours after the fever is gone.
- Be watchful for emergency warning signs.

If one of my residents get sick, when should I call the doctor?

You should take care of your residents like you would any illness. Have them drink lots of clear fluid, take medicine to lower their fever, and rest. You should call the doctor if:

- Your resident or client has flu-like symptoms, including a fever that is higher than 100°F (37.8°C) AND a cough, sore throat, runny nose, or stuffiness.

What if my resident does not have a regular doctor?

If your resident meets the symptom checklist listed above and they do not have a regular doctor, call a local urgent care center.

A list of urgent care centers located in Howard County is available at http://www.howardcountymd.gov/Health/docs/Urgent_care_centers.pdf

When should I take my resident to the emergency room or call an ambulance?

A sick resident may need medical help right away if he or she:

- Is breathing fast, has trouble breathing, or has chest or belly pain.
- Has bluish skin or lip color (for fair tones) and grayish skin or lip color (for darker tones).

- Has sudden dizziness.
- Is not drinking enough fluids.
- Is vomiting and unable to keep liquids down.
- Is not waking up or not interacting normally.
- Has flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough.
- Has a fever with a rash.
- Is unable to urinate for a long period of time.
- Has seizures.
- Is less responsive than normal or becomes confused.

Should I limit visitation to sick and/or well residents?

- A sick person should not have visitors other than caregivers.
- If a person plans on visiting a sick person, you should offer them a surgical mask and limit their movement in your building.
- Post signs at all public entrances asking those with flu symptoms to stay away.
- Visually screen and ask visitors about flu symptoms before allowing them to enter.

Should I screen staff for flu symptoms? When should they come back to work?

- Yes. Ask about and visually screen staff for flu symptoms before having them begin their shift.
- Health care staff with the flu should stay home for up to 7 days after the start of the first symptom and not return to work until at least 24 hours after any fever is gone. The fever should be gone without the use of a fever-lowering medicine.

Should I cancel social activities for my residents?

- Not at this time. If you have residents with flu-like symptoms, limit their movement in the building. Reschedule social events and serve their meals on the nursing units.

When can my resident return to normal activities?

Check with the resident's doctor. Residents with the flu should stay away from others until at least 24 hours after their fever is gone. The fever should be gone without the use of a fever-lowering medicine.

How should I care for sick residents?

Follow your normal infection control plan. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has guidelines to help. See http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/guidelines_infection_control.htm

If one of my residents has the flu, how can I prevent others from getting sick?

- Have only one care-giver take care of the sick person(s).
- Keep the door closed to any sick room(s).
- Remind the sick person to cover their coughs and wash their hands often.
- Have the sick person and any exposed roommate stay in a room apart from the common areas of your facility.
- Ask the sick person's doctor if close contacts should take antiviral medications such as Tamiflu® or Relenza® to prevent the flu.
- Treat the roommates of a resident with flu-like symptoms as if they have the flu.
- Ask sick residents to wear a surgical mask if they need to be in a common area or near other people.
- Have sick residents use a separate bathroom. This bathroom should be cleaned daily with household cleaners.
- Have everyone wash their hands often. Use soap and water or an alcohol-based gel like Purell. Make sure to wash hands after every contact with the sick person or going into the sick person's room or bathroom.
- Use paper towels for drying hands after hand washing.
- Watch other residents for symptoms and contact their doctor if symptoms occur.

What if I'm the caregiver? What steps should I take to keep from getting sick?

- If you are pregnant – you should avoid being the caregiver. Pregnant women are more at risk of complications from the flu.
- Avoid being face-to-face with the sick person. Try to stay at least 6 feet from the sick person.
- If you must have very close contact with the sick person, you may want to wear a surgical mask. The masks may be available at many hardware stores and supermarkets.
- Wash your hands with soap and water or use an alcohol-based gel like Purell after you touch the sick person or handle used tissues or laundry.
- Watch for your own symptoms and contact your doctor if symptoms occur.

How should I take care of the sick person's laundry, trash and room?

- Throw away tissues in the trash after one use. Wash your hands after touching used tissues and similar waste.
- Keep surfaces like bedside tables and the bathroom clean by wiping them down with a household cleaner (like Clorox or Lysol wipes). Make sure to read the directions.
- The sick person's bed sheets and towels, knives and forks, dishes, and cups for drinking do not need to be cleaned separately. Make sure these items are not used by anyone else without washing them first.
- Wash the sick person's bed sheets, towels, and clothes by using laundry soap and tumble dry on a hot setting. Clean your hands with soap and water or alcohol-based gel like Purell right after touching dirty laundry.
- Knives and forks, dishes and cups for drinking can be washed in a dishwasher or by hand with water and soap.

Where can I go for more information?

Howard County Health Department – www.hchealth.org

The Health Department will update our website regularly about H1N1.

For more information, we recommend that you go to the following websites:

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

<http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/>

The State of Maryland

<http://www.dhmh.md.gov/swineflu/index.html>