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Seasonal and H1N1 Flu Frequently Asked Questions and Answers

Why is influenza (flu) important?

Influenza is a leading cause of illness in the United States. It can lead to serious medical problems, hospitalizations, or even death. Each year, the annual seasonal flu results in about 34,000 deaths in the United States. This year, we expect to have the new H1N1 flu causing illness as well as people sick from regular seasonal flu. H1N1 flu is present across California and the nation. As of September 29, 2009, H1N1 flu has resulted in 2,322 hospitalizations and 188 deaths in California. We need the public's help to prevent the spread of flu and keep our residents healthy.

What are the symptoms of the flu?

Flu is a respiratory disease. The symptoms of the flu are:

- Fever
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Body aches
- Headache
- Chills and fatigue
- Nausea, vomiting and diarrhea

How can I prevent getting the flu?

The single best way to prevent the seasonal or H1N1 flu is to get a flu vaccination (Flu shot) each year. You will need to have separate flu vaccines to protect against seasonal and H1N1 flu. You should also:

- Wash hands often with soap and water or use alcohol based hand sanitizer
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people

What is "seasonal flu" and how is it different than "H1N1 flu"?

Seasonal and H1N1 flu are members of the influenza (flu) class of viruses. The seasonal flu virus changes a little (mutates) year to year and causes human illness mostly in the winter season. Because it changes, you need to get a seasonal flu shot every year. H1N1 flu is a new flu virus not related to the seasonal flu. Most people have never been exposed to it, so it can spread more quickly, cause worse symptoms, or affect different risk groups than seasonal flu.

How will I know if I have H1N1?

The confirmation of H1N1 is based on laboratory testing. **Most people who have flu symptoms will not be tested for H1N1.** Most people who are sick with influenza like illness will be asked to stay home, take care of themselves, and recover. A limited number of people with severe illness that may require hospitalization will be tested for confirmation of H1N1 or another influenza type illness.

If you get the flu, prescription antiviral drugs can make your illness milder and make you feel better faster, but only your health care provider can decide whether or not they are right for you. In general, antivirals will only be prescribed those with health conditions that put them at higher risk of serious illness from the flu.

What if I get sick?

If you become ill with flu-like symptoms, including fever, body aches, runny or stuffy nose, sore throat, nausea, or vomiting or diarrhea:

- Stay away from others.
- Always cover your cough.
- Wash your hands often and do not shake hands with others while you are ill.
- Stay home until you are free of a fever (temperature UNDER 100 degrees Fahrenheit) without any fever reducing medicines (Tylenol, Advil, etc.) for at least 24 hours.

Staying at home means that you should not leave your home except to seek medical care. This means avoiding normal activities, including work, school, travel, shopping, social events, and public gatherings.

If you have severe illness or you are at high risk for flu complications, contact your health care provider or seek medical care. Your health care provider will determine whether flu testing or antiviral treatment is needed.

How do I know at what point I should seek medical care for the flu?

The symptoms of the flu are the same as for many other illnesses, such as the common cold or the more serious pneumonia. Therefore, you must use your best judgment as to call or go see your health care provider. Most people with the flu can stay at home and do not require professional care. But if you are very ill or have other health problems, start early with a call to your physician for advice on home care or for an appointment if necessary.

If you become ill and experience any of the following warning signs, seek emergency medical care.

In children, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish or gray skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Not waking up or not interacting
- Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough

In adults, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen

- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough

Who should get a seasonal flu vaccine?

CDC recommends that people who should get vaccinated each year are:

- Children aged 6 months up to their 19th birthday
- Pregnant women
- People 50 years of age and older
- People of any age with certain chronic medical conditions
- People who live in nursing homes and other long-term care facilities
- People who live with or care for those at high risk for complications from flu

Where can I get seasonal flu vaccination?

- Call your health care provider for seasonal flu vaccine availability and an appointment
- Contact any one of several chain pharmacies such as Walgreens or CVS to find out when and where flu shots are available
- Attend one of the Public Health drive through flu clinics the last week of October in four local communities (go to www.countyofplumas for a flu clinic flyer or call 530-283-6330 for more information)
- Come in to the Quincy Public Health Clinic any Thursday afternoon from 2-4 PM through November 19 for Flumist nasal spray. Flumist is only for healthy people 2-49, and children under 18 must be accompanied by a parent or guardian.

Will the seasonal flu vaccine provide protection against the H1N1 flu?

No. The influenza vaccine for this year's seasonal flu does not provide protection against the H1N1 virus. What we do know is that the vaccine for 2009-H1N1 will be separate from seasonal flu vaccines, so people who want to receive both vaccines will be receiving at least two vaccinations. Children 9 and under will need a booster, or second dose, of flu vaccine in order to have good protection.

Who will be recommended as priority groups to receive the novel H1N1 vaccine?

On July 29, 2009, the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP)—an advisory committee to CDC—recommended that novel H1N1 flu vaccine be made available first to the following five groups:

- Pregnant women
- Health care workers and emergency medical responders
- People caring for infants under 6 months of age
- Children and young adults from 6 months to 24 years
- People aged 25 to 64 years with underlying medical conditions (e.g. asthma, diabetes)

Combined, these groups would equal approximately 159 million individuals.

When will the H1N1 flu vaccine be available?

Local health care providers and Public Health are planning to provide H1N1 vaccine in Plumas County some time in November as adequate supplies arrive. The Public Health focus will be on those without health insurance or a regular medical provider. Priority groups for H1N1 vaccine are pregnant women, children and young adults 6 months to 24 years, people aged 25-64 years with chronic medical conditions, and health care

or emergency medical workers. Health officials expect weekly shipments of H1N1 vaccine through the fall and winter.

Where can I get the H1N1 flu vaccine?

The H1N1 flu vaccine will be available through local health care providers. At this time, Public Health is planning school based and drive through H1N1 flu vaccination clinics, just as we do for seasonal flu. We appreciate your patience and understanding as we work to protect the health of our residents. As soon as times and locations of H1N1 flu vaccine clinics are known, that information will be shared with the public. Public Health will not schedule flu clinics until adequate supplies of vaccine arrive.

Will the H1N1 vaccine make me sick?

The reaction to the H1N1 flu vaccine is anticipated to be similar to that seen with the seasonal flu vaccine. Usually, there are no noticeable effects, but minor reactions such as soreness at the injection site are relatively common.

What should I do if I'm caring for someone with the flu?

It is best to prevent the spread of respiratory droplets and germs (the spray that comes out when you cough or sneeze). This is best accomplished by:

- Keep the sick person in a room separate from the common areas of the house
- Consider having the sick person wear a face mask and covering their coughs and sneezes
- As a caregiver avoid being face to face with the sick person
- Clean hands with soap and water or alcohol based hand rub each time you enter and leave the sick room
- Clean surfaces with disinfectant
- Do not share towels or eating utensils.

Do I need medications to recover from the flu?

Some people take over the counter flu or cold medicine to lessen the symptoms of the flu, but most people do not need medications to recover from the flu. Comfort measures such as acetaminophen (Tylenol), decongestants, cough drops, tea and rest are safe and may help you feel better. Do not give aspirin to children or teenagers who have the flu as this can cause a rare but serious illness called Reyes syndrome.

Antiviral drugs are prescription medicines (pills, liquid or an inhaled powder) that fight the flu. If you get sick, antiviral drugs can make your illness milder and make you feel better faster. They may also prevent serious flu complications. You should talk to your health care provider about use of antivirals to prevent influenza, as misuse of antivirals can lead to resistance, meaning flu viruses that can't be treated. Antivirals may be prioritized for persons with severe illness or those at higher risk for flu complications. Only your health care provider can prescribe antiviral medicines. He or she will decide if they are right for you.

Is H1N1 flu more dangerous than seasonal flu?

It is still early in the study of H1N1 flu but it could be more serious for children and young adults, people of any age with chronic medical conditions or who are pregnant or overweight. But for many people, the H1N1 virus does not appear to be more severe than seasonal influenza. People with underlying medical conditions should be cautious with any type of flu.

For more information, see: www.countyofplumas.com, www.cdph.ca.gov, www.flu.gov, or www.cdc.gov. You can also call and speak to the Plumas County Public Health Agency Nurse of the day by calling 530-283-6330 or 1-800-801-6330 during regular business hours.

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