



Parent Tips - Swine Flu (H1N1)

What is the Swine Flu (H1N1)?

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Swine Flu (H1N1) is a type of influenza (flu) virus that causes respiratory disease that can spread between people.

What are the symptoms?

In most children, the symptoms of Swine Flu (H1N1) are similar to the symptoms of regular flu. They include: fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue, and occasionally vomiting and diarrhea. Swine Flu cannot be obtained by eating pork or any pork product.

How Do I Protect My Family From Getting the Swine Flu (H1N1)?

Parents and their children should take common-sense measures to protect against contracting and spreading the flu. These measures include avoiding close contact with people who are sick, staying home when you are sick to help prevent others from catching your illness, covering your mouth or nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing, cleaning your hands often, avoiding touching your eyes, nose, or mouth, and practicing other good health habits such as getting plenty of rest and eating healthy food.

In addition, it is also recommended that parents consider regularly disinfecting common public areas in their homes and workplaces. The virus can live on hard surfaces for up to seven hours, so wiping down desks, tables, door knobs, counters and other commonly used areas more than once a day is also recommended.

How Do I Talk to My Child About Swine Flu (H1N1)?

Explain to children that this is another strain of the flu, but consider their age and maturity level. Try not to overwhelm them with information.

Suggested Approaches:

- **Maintain your composure.** Kids will worry if you act worried.
- **Talk about the Flu in an age-appropriate manner.** Explain to children that this is another strain of the flu, but consider their age and maturity level and make sure not to overwhelm them.
- **Be patient.** It's common for children to ask the same questions over and over.
- **Help children to express their concerns.** Encourage children to share what they are thinking, their concerns, and questions. Find creative ways of communicating, such as through art, writing, or music.
- **Listen.** Ask questions. Find out what your children know about the situation. Make sure they understand the facts, and discuss what they've seen or heard.
- **Make yourself available.** Your children may need extra attention from you. Make time for them.
- **Tell your children you love them, and offer plenty of hugs and kisses.** Maintain a strong level of affection in your home to help children feel calm.

What Are Some Key Topics Parents Should Communicate to their Children?

- At the present time very few people are sick with the Swine flu virus in this country. School and health officials are being especially careful to make sure as few people as possible get sick.
- There are things we can do to stay healthy and avoid spreading disease, such as washing your hands, covering your mouths with a tissue when you sneeze or cough, and staying home when you don't feel well.

- It is important that all students treat each other with respect and not jump to conclusions about who may or may not have the flu.

What Are the Resources Available in My Community to Support Parents?

A Parent Teacher Association® (PTA), school nurse, school psychologist, or school social worker can be helpful resources to parents. Talk to your school nurse, school psychologist, school counselor, or school social worker if your child is having difficulties as a result of anxiety or stress related to the flu. Parents should speak with a school principal regarding a potential school closure.

Why are Schools Closing?

Schools are asked to strongly consider a school closure where there is a confirmed case of the Swine Flu (H1N1) among students or staff. In addition, schools may also consider a closure when a suspected case has occurred; for instance, if a student has been exposed to someone with a confirmed case of Swine Flu (H1N1), particularly a person with whom that student lives.

Who Decides if My Child's School Closes?

Though the federal government is regularly issuing and updating guidance for the public on how to best deal with this rapidly developing situation, it is important to remember that any decision to close a school due to a confirmed case will be made at the local or state level.

How Long Could My Child's School be Closed?

In the case that a student or school staff member is confirmed to have Swine Flu (H1N1), it is recommended that the school close for approximately seven days. This is done in order to prevent further possible spread of the virus in the community.

What if My Child's School Closes?

Parents should pay close attention to what is developing in their local area and start to think about alternative child care arrangements, should their child's school close. Keep in mind that a local outbreak might lead to multiple types of public closings, so traditional group day care centers or afterschool programs may also be closed. Keeping your child at home, rather than allowing them to spend their day in public places, such as a movie theater or shopping mall, is also advisable. Family members, neighbors or other trusted adults may be able to help provide child care in these situations. Extra-curricular activities and school meals will be halted during a school closure. Parents are advised to make alternate plans in these circumstances.

Where Can I Go For Further Information?

- The National Parent Teacher Association: www.pta.org
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/key_facts.htm
- US Department of Health and Human Services: <http://www.hhs.gov/>
- US Department of Education: <http://www.ed.gov>

Sources – US Department of Education, US Center for Disease Control, National Association of School Psychologists, and National Association of School Nurses.