

Many people are wondering what the differences are between seasonal flu and H1N1 flu (Swine Flu). H1N1 flu is caused by a new virus that is different from the seasonal flu we usually see each fall and winter. The virus that causes the seasonal flu changes a little bit each year, but the changes are small and people have some resistance to the virus. This year, the flu virus that is spreading is new and different enough so that many people, especially younger people, do not have much resistance. This is the reason why so many people got sick in the spring and we expect to see many more people, especially children, come down with the flu this fall.

Every year people get sick with the flu and every year some people die or are hospitalized from the flu. With the H1N1 flu, the people who are most likely to get the flu and who may get sickest are pregnant women, children under 5 years, people of any age with certain chronic medical conditions, such as asthma, diabetes, or lung disease, people under 19 years who are receiving long-term aspirin therapy, people 65 years or older, and residents of nursing homes and other chronic care facilities.

For the best protection, get vaccinated

Because seasonal flu will be around at the same time as H1N1 flu, it is important for everyone to get seasonal flu vaccine now. As H1N1 vaccine is manufactured and delivered it will go first to people in certain priority groups including pregnant women, people who live with or care for children under 6 months of age, health care workers, emergency medical responders, persons ages 6 months-24 years, and people 25-64 years old who have chronic health disorders or compromised immune systems. After that, everyone else will be able to get it. For the best protection, get the H1N1 vaccine as soon as it is available to you.

Watch for flu symptoms

Flu symptoms include fever, cough, runny nose, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. With H1N1 flu sometimes there is diarrhea and vomiting. If you get these symptoms, stay home and limit contact with others until at least 24 hours after your fever has gone without the use of medicine. Most people can recover from flu at home with no need for medical treatment. However, if you are at high risk for complications of flu, contact your doctor.

Fight the flu

Take these everyday steps to prevent the spread of germs and reduce your risk of getting or spreading the flu:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, or sneeze into your sleeve – not your hands. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- Wash your hands often with soap and warm water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based gel hand cleaners are also good to use if you are not near a sink.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people. Stay at least six feet away from someone who is coughing or sneezing.
- If you have the flu and will be around other people, you should wear a facemask. If you must take care of someone with the flu, and are at high risk of serious illness if you get sick, you should also wear a mask.

More information about the flu is available at www.nyhealth.gov and www.flu.gov.