

## **Frequently Asked Questions on 2009 H1N1 Flu October 1, 2009**

- 1. What is H1N1 Influenza?** It is an illness caused by a type of influenza virus. It is contagious and since April 2009 there have been many cases reported in the United States and around the world. Currently there are patients in Summit County and Colorado sick with this illness.
  
- 2. How does 2009 H1N1 flu compare in severity to seasonal flu?** It is comparable to seasonal flu however at risk groups are dissimilar in 2009 H1N1 flu – at risk groups are:
  - Pregnant Women
  - *Infants less than 6 months of age*
  - Persons between the ages of 6 months – 4 years
  - Persons 5 – 18 years old with compromised immune systems or chronic health disorders such as:
    - asthma
    - diabetes
    - cancer
    - HIV/AIDS
    - heart disease
  
- 3. What are the symptoms?** The symptoms are very similar to seasonal flu and include: **fever, cough, sore throat** and runny nose. They can also include body aches, headache, chills, feeling very tired, diarrhea and vomiting.
  
- 4. How does the virus spread?** The virus spreads from person to person mainly through coughing or sneezing by people who have the virus. Sometimes people may also get the virus from touching an object or surface that has the flu virus on it and then touching their mouth, nose and/or eyes.
  
- 5. What is the County doing to be prepared for this situation?** We are actively monitoring and briefing on changing situations, evaluating the 2009 H1N1 status, holding meetings with senior management, emergency management, school districts, public health, healthcare, and emergency responders within the community. In addition we are sharing educational and factual information with the public through multiple sources; newspapers, TV, radio, websites, emails, letters, and public meetings.
  
- 6. Is there a vaccine for the H1N1 flu?** A vaccine is currently being developed and it is thought that the first shipment of H1N1 flu shots will be available in mid October. Due to supply limitations vaccine will initially be

reserved for the following higher-risk groups based on current recommendations from CDC. These are as follows, but may be subject to change based on supply:

- Pregnant Women
- People who live with or care for children younger than 6 months of age
- Healthcare Workers WITH DIRECT PATIENT CONTACT
- Persons between the ages of 6 months – 4 years
- Persons 5 – 18 years with chronic health disorders or compromised immune systems.

- 7. Is the H1N1 vaccine safe?** The 2009 H1N1 flu vaccine is being developed and manufactured exactly like seasonal flu vaccine. This process has been safely used for decades. The H1N1 vaccine has an excellent safety profile.
- 8. If I got my seasonal flu shot, am I protected from the 2009 H1N1 flu?** Because this is a different strain of flu, *the seasonal flu vaccination will not protect people from the 2009 H1N1 virus.*
- 9. Is it possible to contract H1N1 more than once?** We don't know enough about 2009 H1N1 (and the immune response to it) to say for sure. It is important to understand that flu viruses undergo frequent changes during an outbreak. In general, exposure to a particular strain of flu virus will protect you against that specific strain, but not other strains of the virus.
- 10. Aside from the vaccine how can I protect myself from getting sick?**
- If possible, avoid close contact with anyone who has a cold or the flu,
  - Wash your hands often with soap and warm water, or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer,
  - Avoid touching your nose, mouth and eyes,
  - Clean things that are touched often like door handles, telephones, faucets, *etc.*,
  - ***If you get sick with a flu-like illness stay home from work and school and avoid contact with others so the virus does not spread!***
- 11. How do I disinfect surfaces in my house?** Flu viruses can survive up to 2 to 8 hours on hard surfaces. Keep surfaces clean by wiping them down with household sanitizers or disinfectants according to product instructions. You may also use a solution of 2 tablespoons bleach to one cup water.

**12. Should I be wearing a mask?** There are currently no recommendations for the general public to wear masks.

**13. Despite these precautions - I'm sick, what should I do?**

- Contact your medical provider to discuss your condition.
- You should stay home and avoid contact with other people until your fever has been totally gone for 24 hours.
- Clean your hands often with soap and water or hand sanitizer.
- Cover your mouth with your elbow, a tissue, or your sleeve when you cough or sneeze.
- You should also rest, drink plenty of fluids (such as water, broth, sports drinks, or electrolyte beverages for infants) and take ibuprofen or acetaminophen for fever and body aches (avoid aspirin, especially in children).

**14. When should I see a medical provider?** Most people who become ill with this virus are able to be cared for at home and do not need to be seen by a medical provider, although you should not hesitate to call your provider to discuss your condition. **Seek medical attention if any of the following serious symptoms occur:**

- difficulty breathing or shortness of breath,
- pain or pressure in the abdomen or chest,
- sudden dizziness, confusion,
- severe or persistent vomiting,
- seizures,
- a fever that cannot be controlled with medication.

**15. Are there medications to treat H1N1 infection?** There are medications available that may be used to treat this infection. Your medical provider may prescribe an antiviral medication for you at the time of your visit.

**16. What is the wisdom or need for testing?** It has been determined that the virus is in our community and testing is unnecessary due to similarities of 2009 H1N1 flu and seasonal flu in both severity and treatment methods. The specific flu virus does not dictate treatment; rather patient symptoms and the clinical judgment of the health care provider will indicate the specific treatment. **It should be noted that if you have serious symptoms such as: difficulty breathing or shortness of breath, pain or pressure in the abdomen or chest, sudden dizziness, confusion, severe or persistent vomiting, seizures or a fever that cannot be controlled with medication seek medical attention.**

**17. How long can an infected person spread the 2009 H1N1 flu to others?** People with flu virus should be considered potentially contagious

as long as they have symptoms and possibly for up to 7 days. Children, especially younger children, might be contagious for longer periods. Persons who have been ill should remain at home until their fever has subsided for at least 24 hours without the use of fever reducing medications such as Tylenol or ibuprofen.

**18. Summit County suffered a fatality within the community. Does that mean the 2009 H1N1 flu has changed?** No, as with the seasonal flu individuals are affected differently and may react severely. Given personal medical history, the flu may be fatal. The individual that died in Summit County had underlying medical conditions that contributed to his death. Public Health guidelines have not changed as a result of this tragedy, but this is a rapidly evolving situation and clinics, schools, and public health agencies are continually monitoring the pandemic.

**19. Why aren't schools shutting down?** Our public schools continue to follow the guidance from our state and local public health departments. Schools are monitoring student absenteeism due to flu-like illness and reporting that on a daily basis to Public Health. At this time, Public Health is not recommending the closure of schools, cancellation of athletics or activities due to the H1N1 virus. It has not been demonstrated that closing or canceling these events has any effect on the virus circulating throughout the community. Even if schools or events were canceled the public would still gather in numerous other public and private venues, i.e. grocery stores, retail outlets, churches, recreation centers, community centers, homes, theaters, and many at other activities. As with the seasonal flu individuals are affected differently and may react severely given personal medical history the flu may be fatal. It is important that individuals seek medical treatment based upon their symptoms and reaction to the flu.