

This flu season

This winter, H1N1 influenza 09 (human swine influenza), along with other influenza viruses is circulating in the community. Generally, the virus produces a mild disease in most, severe disease in some, and is a moderate illness overall.

Many more people are likely to be affected by influenza-like illness this year than in recent flu seasons, because the community will have not have immunity to the H1N1 influenza 09 virus.

The best way to stop the spread of influenza, and to protect people who may be more vulnerable to severe outcomes if they contract the virus, is to keep sick children home and encourage good hygiene.

What are the symptoms of Human Swine Influenza?

They are similar to those of seasonal influenza - fever (greater than 38°C or a good history of fever) plus cough and/or sore throat. Other symptoms can include fatigue, myalgia, headache, body aches or chills.

What are the vulnerable groups?

Those most at risk of serious illness as a result of Human Swine Influenza include people with chronic diseases such as respiratory disease (including asthma), heart disease, diabetes, renal and liver disease, morbid obesity and immunosuppression. Pregnant women and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are also at higher risk from this infection.

What should I do if my child develops flu like symptoms?

- Keep your child at home and limit contact with others until your child is well. Your child may return to school and other activities when they are completely well, or when at least 24 hours have passed since their fever has resolved, whichever is the longer.
- Mild flu like symptoms in those at low risk generally can be treated at home with simple measures including fluids, rest and paracetamol to reduce fevers.
- Seek medical advice or contact 13 HEALTH (13 43 25 84) if symptoms are not relieved or worsen.
- Seek medical advice if your child is in a vulnerable group or has other underlying medical conditions. Antiviral treatment may be indicated and should be commenced as early as practicable and within the first 48 hours of illness.
- If your child's illness is moderate or severe, treatment is likely to be indicated and your child should be seen by a doctor.
- Please call ahead if seeing a doctor, advising of your child's symptoms.
- Ensure your child and those around them practice good hand hygiene, cover their nose and mouth when they cough and sneeze, and dispose of tissues promptly.
- Restrict close contact (within one metre) with others as much as possible, especially with any family members who are in a vulnerable group. If your child is in a vulnerable group, or their illness is moderate or severe, antiviral medications such as oseltamivir (Tamiflu) or zanamivir (Relenza) may be prescribed by your doctor.

What is the best way to protect myself or my children from Human Swine Influenza?

The best way to protect yourself and others is to:

- stay home when you are sick
- wash your hands frequently with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand gel
- wash your hands prior to touching your eyes, nose and mouth
- when coughing or sneezing, cover your mouth and nose with disposable tissues which should be disposed of immediately
- do not share items such as cigarettes, glasses or cups, lipstick, toys or anything which could be contaminated with respiratory secretions
- maintain at least a one metre distance from people who have flu-like symptoms such as coughing or sneezing