



Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield of New Jersey

Making Healthcare Work<sup>®</sup>

# Important Information about novel H1N1 (swine flu)

## Knowledge is power

While the recent emergence of novel influenza A (H1N1 or swine flu) has been widely reported, Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield of New Jersey wants to ensure that you are up-to-date with information regarding the spread of this new virus.

The following information can help address misconceptions you may have about the severity of the virus and educate you about the best ways to protect yourself and others from the virus.

## What is novel H1N1 (swine flu)?

Novel H1N1 (swine flu) is a new influenza virus that is spreading from human to human, leading the World Health Organization (WHO) to recently declare the spread of the virus a pandemic flu outbreak. This virus was originally referred to as "swine flu" because laboratory testing showed that many of the genes in this new virus were very similar to influenza viruses that normally occur in pigs (swine) in North America. But further study has shown that this new virus is very different from what normally circulates in North American pigs.

Because it's a new virus, no one has immunity to it and everyone could be at risk of catching it. This includes healthy adults as well as older individuals, children and those with existing medical conditions.

## How does flu spread?

Flu viruses are made up of tiny particles that spread through the droplets from your nose and mouth when you cough or sneeze. When you cough or sneeze without covering your nose and mouth, those droplets can spread, putting others at risk of breathing them in.

If you cough or sneeze into your hands, the germs are easily spread from your hands to any hard surfaces that you touch, and those germs can live on those surfaces for some time. If other people touch those surfaces and then touch their eyes, nose or mouth, the germs can enter their systems and they can become infected. That is how all cold and flu viruses are passed from person to person.

## What are the symptoms of the flu?

Some common symptoms are:

- Fever.
- Cough.
- Headache.
- Sore throat.
- Tiredness.
- Chills.
- Aching muscles.
- Loss of appetite.
- Sneezing.
- Runny nose.

## What have our federal and local governments been doing to prepare for a flu outbreak?

Our federal and local governments have been preparing for a flu outbreak for many years. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and WHO are monitoring the current situation, and there is good reason to be confident that the United States and the rest of the world will be able to provide a preventive vaccine and control a flu outbreak. There is an ample supply of antiviral drugs (including Tamiflu<sup>®</sup> and Relenza<sup>®</sup>) – enough to treat millions of people.

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While antiviral drugs are not a cure, if taken within 48 hours of developing symptoms, they help you recover by:

- **Relieving some of your symptoms.**
- **Reducing the length of time you are ill.**
- **Reducing the potential for serious complications, such as pneumonia.**

## Is there a vaccination?

Seasonal influenza vaccinations are available; however, there are none available at this time for the novel H1N1 virus. As this is a completely new type of virus, the U.S. government is working closely with manufacturers to develop a novel H1N1 vaccine. Making new influenza vaccines that are ready to immunize people generally takes five to six months after first identification of the pandemic virus. The novel H1N1 virus was identified at the end of April 2009.

The first doses of H1N1 vaccine usable to immunize people are expected as early as October 2009.

## What can I do to protect myself and others from the flu?

The best thing you can do to protect yourself is to practice good hygiene. Face masks won't prevent you from being infected with the flu. Practicing good hygiene helps slow the spread of the virus and is the single most effective precaution you can take to protect yourself and others from infection. The rules of good hygiene include:

- **Using clean tissues to cover your nose and mouth when you cough or sneeze, or coughing or sneezing into your elbow.**
- **Discarding tissues after you use them.**
- **Washing your hands often with soap and hot water or using sanitizer gels.**
- **Calling your physician for guidance if you think you have symptoms of the flu.**

Handwashing is the single most effective way to prevent the spread of infection.

## Where can I get more information?

Visit the following Web sites to get more information:

New Jersey State Department of Health and Human Services (NJSDHHS):  
[www.state.nj.us/health](http://www.state.nj.us/health)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):  
[www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)  
[www.pandemicflu.gov](http://www.pandemicflu.gov)

World Health Organization (WHO):  
[www.who.int](http://www.who.int)

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