

When to seek medical care for possible influenza, including H1N1 influenza (swine flu)

What is influenza?

Influenza (also known as the flu) is a respiratory illness caused by flu viruses that can spread easily from person to person. Seasonal flu and H1N1 are both influenza viruses. Influenza usually comes on suddenly and can cause mild to severe illness. Symptoms usually are fever and cough or sore throat, and may also include headache, extreme tiredness, runny or stuffy nose, or muscle aches. Nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea are other flu symptoms and are more common in children than adults.

Does everyone who is sick with the flu need to see a health care provider?

Use the same judgment you would use during a typical flu season. Do not seek medical care if you are not ill or have mild symptoms for which you would not ordinarily seek medical care. Most children and adults who are sick with the flu and are generally in good health will recover without needing to visit a health care provider. Some people may want to call their health care provider for advice about how to care for the flu at home (You can also get home care information from www.kingcounty.gov/health/H1N1).

Who should call or visit a health care provider?

- Children and adults who are ill and at higher risk for more severe illness (see below)
- Children and adults with more severe flu symptoms should call their health care provider or go to an urgent care clinic or emergency department if they cannot reach their health care provider.

Whenever possible, **call** your health care provider to get advice before making an appointment. Please do not go to an emergency department unless you have severe symptoms or a chronic condition that makes you at higher risk for flu complications.

I think I have the flu. What should I do?

- If you are sick with the flu, you may be ill for a week or longer. Please stay home so you can get better and prevent others from getting ill. Drink plenty of fluids and rest as much as possible. Avoid travel. Do not go to work or school until at least 24 hours after your fever is gone without the use of fever-reducing medicine (like Tylenol and ibuprofen).
- Only go out if you need medical care or other important supplies. If you leave the house to seek medical care, wear a facemask.
- Wash your hands frequently with warm water and soap or use a hand sanitizer.
- Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue or the sleeve of your elbow.
- In general, avoid contact with other people as much as possible to keep from spreading your illness, especially those with one of the high-risk chronic conditions listed on the next page.

I think I have the flu. Can I get tested and treatment for H1N1 influenza or seasonal flu?

Testing and treatment is not needed or recommended for most children and adults who get the flu. Antiviral medication is not currently recommended except for people with the flu who have severe illness or are at higher risk for complications (see next page).

Who is at increased risk for more severe illness from influenza?

- Children younger than five years old – particularly children younger than 2 years old, for whom the risk for severe health problems from seasonal influenza is highest.
- Adults 65 years of age or older
- Pregnant women
- People with the following medical conditions:
 - chronic diseases of the lung (including asthma), heart (except hypertension), kidney, liver, blood (including sickle cell disease), brain or nervous system, muscles (particularly those that cause difficulty with swallowing), or metabolism (including diabetes mellitus);
 - a weakened immune system, including caused by medications or by HIV; or
 - people 19 years old or younger who are receiving long-term aspirin therapy.

When should I see a medical provider right away?

If you become ill and experience any of the following warning signs, go to an emergency room or urgent care center. If symptoms are not severe, try to contact your health care provider first.

For **children**, emergency warning signs include:

- Breathing much faster than usual or trouble breathing or pain with breathing
- Bluish or gray skin color (call 911 immediately)
- Not waking up or not interacting
- Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough (if not severe, try to contact your health care provider before going to an urgent care or emergency department).
- If a child is not drinking enough fluids or has severe or persistent vomiting, try to contact your health care provider. If you cannot contact your health care provider and the child is not improving, go to an urgent care or emergency department.

For **adults**, emergency warning signs include:

- Breathing much faster than usual, difficulty breathing or pain with breathing
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness or lightheadedness at rest or when standing up
- Confusion
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough (if not severe, try to contact your health care provider before going to an urgent care or emergency department)
- If an adult cannot drink enough fluids or has severe or persistent vomiting, try to contact your health care provider. If you cannot reach your health care provider, go to an urgent care or emergency department.

More information:

Public Health – Seattle & King County's H1N1 influenza **web page**:

www.kingcounty.gov/health/H1N1

Public Health - Seattle & King County **Hotline**: 877-903-KING (5464)

TTY Relay: 711. Available in English and Spanish/Español

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) H1N1 flu information:

<http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/>