

your health

H1N1 (Swine) Flu Newsletter

H1N1 (Swine) Flu: Disinfect Your Home

Washing your hands and keeping surfaces in your home clean and disinfected can help prevent the spread of illness and keep you and your family well. There is still much to learn about the H1N1 flu virus (swine flu). But past experience with seasonal flu, plus common sense, probably still applies.

Germes are most often spread when a sick person coughs or sneezes. Droplets from an infected family member can move through the air and land on surfaces in the home. The virus is thought to be able to live on surfaces for up to 2 to 8 hours. If you touch the surface within that time frame, then touch your eyes, nose or mouth before washing your hands, you could get sick.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends washing your hands with soap and water, or using hand sanitizer, after touching surfaces that may be infected with the virus.

Keep surfaces clean. Pay special attention to bedside tables, bathroom and kitchen surfaces, toys, phones, computer keyboards and doorknobs. Wipe them down with a household disinfectant. Follow the directions on the product label.

Chlorine bleach, hydrogen peroxide, detergents, soaps, antiseptics and alcohol are all effective against human influenza viruses if used properly. Again, follow all label instructions carefully. The

CDC believes these products should also work against H1N1 or swine flu virus.

Keep trash cans handy. To prevent the spread of virus, throw away tissues and other disposable items (such as paper cups or plates) right away. Keep trash cans available throughout your home. Always wash your hands after you touch a used tissue or empty the garbage.

Keep linens clean. Don't share bed sheets or towels if anyone in your home is sick. You don't have to wash linens separately, though. Just use your usual household laundry soap and tumble dry on a hot setting.

Avoid "hugging" dirty laundry as you collect it and put it in the washer. Wash your hands right away after handling dirty laundry. Consider using paper towels to dry your hands after washing. Or, give each member of your household a separate towel (label towels or choose a unique color for each person).

Cleaning dishes and utensils. Don't share dishes or eating utensils before they are washed. These items can be washed in the dishwasher or by hand with dish soap and water. If you use paper plates or cups, throw them away after a single use.

Keep your home well ventilated. If weather permits, open windows in bathrooms, bedrooms and kitchen.

Geri K. Metzger, Staff Writer
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H1N1 (Swine) Flu: Protecting Your Child at School

Fears of a pandemic can be especially trying for parents. Sending your children to school and possibly exposing them to sick classmates can be scary. Knowing how to protect your child can help ease your anxiety.

Rest assured that your child's school has plans in place for reacting to a serious outbreak of H1N1 influenza A (swine flu) or any other epidemic. You can also help your children protect themselves from swine flu, and many other infections, by teaching them some easy prevention tips.

Helping kids avoid germs

Help keep your kids healthy by teaching them to:

- **Wash their hands.** The most important prevention technique you can teach your kids is to wash their hands frequently with warm soap and water for at least 20 seconds - about the time it takes to sing "Happy Birthday" twice.
- **Use hand sanitizers.** Also give them alcohol-based hand sanitizers to keep in their book bags or purses. Tell them to use it after touching any surface where germs may live and to rub it on their hands until they are dry.

- **Know when to wash or sanitize their hands.** Teach them to wash or sanitize after touching such surfaces as:
 - Stair rails
 - Lunch room tables and chairs
 - Gym equipment
 - Pens, pencils or other school supplies borrowed from other students
 - Lockers
 - Computer keyboards
 - Desks and chairs
 - Water fountains
 - Bathroom faucets
 - Doorknobs
- **Keep their hands away from their face.** Tell your kids not to touch their eyes, nose or mouth unless their hands are clean. Explain to nail-biters that their habit can increase their chances for infection.
- **Don't share cups or utensils.** Tell them not to drink from a classmate's cup, take a bite from a friend's sandwich or share spoons and forks with other students.

Keep them at home

If your child shows signs of illness, keep him or her at home and call your doctor.

Diane Griffith, Staff Writer
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H1N1 (Swine) Flu: 7 Ways to Help Avoid Infection

With the spread of the influenza A (H1N1) flu virus, also called swine flu, people are looking for things they can do to avoid getting sick. Here are some simple steps you can take to lower your risk of infection.

1. Wash your hands often and well.

Handwashing is an easy but powerful way to prevent swine flu and many other types of infection.

- Use soap (any type will do) and warm water.
- Scrub for 20 seconds (count slowly to be sure you spent enough time). Be sure to clean between your fingers and under and around your fingernails.
- Rinse well under running water, and dry with a clean towel or paper towel.
- Use your towel to turn off the water and open the door so you don't get germs on your hands.
- If you don't have access to soap and water, use an alcohol-based hand rub. Apply the product to your palm and rub your hands together, covering all surfaces of your hands and fingers, until dry.

2. Keep your hands away from your eyes, nose and mouth.

Flu germs can live for a couple of hours on surfaces such as doorknobs and desks. They can enter your body if you touch a contaminated surface and then touch your eyes, nose or mouth.

3. Steer clear of sick people. Try to avoid close contact with people who are sick. Stay out of crowds if there's a swine flu outbreak in your area.

4. Cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze. Use a tissue and then throw it away. If

you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your elbow. Then wash your hands well to get rid of the germs.

5. Ask your doctor if you should wear a facemask or respirator. Some people are at high risk for flu complications. They may need to wear a facemask or respirator if they could be exposed to the H1N1 virus, either by caring for someone who has the flu or by being in a large crowd during a local outbreak of H1N1 flu. Your doctor can tell you if you are at high risk and what type of protection you should use.

6. Build your defenses. Keep your immune system strong by eating a healthy diet, getting plenty of sleep and getting regular exercise. Always talk to your doctor before you increase your activity level.

7. Stay well-informed. Listen to local newscasts to stay abreast of school closures or other alerts. For the latest information on swine flu, call the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Hotline at 800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636). Information is available in English and Spanish, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

If you get swine flu

Sometimes even the best prevention fails. Call your doctor if you develop symptoms of swine flu. These can include fever, headache, fatigue, sore throat, cough and body aches. Some people also have vomiting and diarrhea. Your doctor can tell you if you need testing or treatment.

If you do get swine flu, stay home for seven days after your symptoms started. This can help keep the disease from spreading. If you must go out to see a doctor, wear a face mask to keep from spreading the flu germs.

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H1N1 (Swine) Flu Worries: 10 Ways to Calm Your Nerves

The number of sick people is climbing, and a vaccine is not ready yet. The swine (H1N1) flu has some people on edge. But don't let the "what ifs" take over. Keep your nerves in check by following these 10 tips:

1. Stay informed. Many people are talking about H1N1 flu. But some of this information is misinformation. Make sure you get the facts about H1N1 flu from reliable sources. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is updating their H1N1 flu Web site daily. Go to www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu for the most current information. Or, check back often at www.myoptumhealth.com.

2. But don't stay glued to your television or computer. Take a break from the news if it's making you feel more anxious or depressed. Fill your time with activities that make you happy and take your mind off your worries.

3. Keep things in perspective. According to the CDC, most cases of H1N1 flu have been relatively mild in the U.S. And the virus is responding to treatment. Call your doctor if you have flu-like symptoms. If you are diagnosed with H1N1 flu, chances are you'll fully recover.

4. Have healthy habits. Good health protects you from certain illnesses. Live a healthy lifestyle by:

- Getting enough sleep.
- Exercising regularly. Check with your doctor before you increase your activity level.
- Eating nutritious foods.
- Drinking plenty of water.
- Manage your stress.

5. Be prepared. Being ready for a crisis may reduce some of your anxiety:

- Stock up on food, water and other supplies. Store enough non-perishable food, water and other household items that will last two weeks if possible.

- Keep supplies on hand that you may need in case of illness. This includes prescription and over-the-counter medication and medical supplies.
- Consider what would happen if you could not go into the office or if your child's school temporarily closed. Ask your employer if working from home would be an option. Check to see if your child could bring home school work.

6. Talk to your kids. There's a good chance they're nervous, too. You can help ease their worried minds. Answer all of their questions about the outbreak honestly. If their school closes, keep other parts of their routine as normal as possible. They learn how to handle stress by watching you. Cope well and they will follow your lead.

7. Stay connected. Keep up your normal social routine. Doing so may be a welcome distraction. Share your concerns with your friends and family. They may be able to offer you advice and support. If you cannot leave your house, keep your social networks intact through phone and e-mail.

8. Have faith in the experts. U.S. and world public health officials have been preparing for a possible flu pandemic for years. They have the ability and resources to deal with a worldwide outbreak. They're working hard to stop the spread of the H1N1 flu and reduce the severity of the virus.

9. Be resilient. Resilience is your ability to cope with hard times and stress. Remember how you got through a difficult situation in the past, and use those skills to help you now.

10. Get help. If you feel extremely anxious or if your fears are interfering with your life, seek help. Your primary doctor may be able to refer you to a mental health professional.

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H1N1 (Swine) Flu Testing: What to Expect

If your doctor suspects you could have swine flu, you may be tested. Here's what to expect if you go in for H1N1 influenza A (swine flu) testing.

Before you go to the doctor ...

It is critical to contact your doctor or health care provider and report your symptoms before you go to the clinic, hospital, lab or office. That way, preparations can be made to keep you isolated from others at the site of care if needed.

- Based on your symptoms, your doctor will decide whether you need testing or treatment for the H1N1 virus.
- Make sure you tell your doctor if you have recently traveled to an area where the swine flu has been found or if you have come in contact with anyone who has been diagnosed with swine flu.

What's involved in testing for swine flu?

Typical flu testing starts with a simple collection of fluid from your throat or nose.

A nasopharyngeal (NP) wash or swab is done to collect fluid from your nasal passage.

- For kids, this may be done by flushing a small amount of saline into the nose and gently sucking out the fluid mixed with mucus.
- For adults, a long cotton swab may be inserted into the nostril, and the inside of the nose is swabbed to collect secretions.

Sometimes, the throat is swabbed to collect secretions instead of the nasal passages.

This specimen of respiratory fluids is usually first screened for influenza A locally. These test results are typically available the same day. But, this only tells you if you have an influenza A flu virus, not specifically the H1N1.

If the test is positive for influenza A, then the specimen is sent to a state lab or the Centers for Disease Control for further testing for the H1N1 influenza type A virus. At the state lab or at the CDC, the specific virus and strain can be identified. This can take three to five days.

You do not need to give a blood sample for flu testing.

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Hand Sanitizers: Are They as Good as Soap in Fighting Infection?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) makes it clear: Washing your hands is one of the best ways to prevent illness. If you are sick, it's also the best way to keep your illness from spreading to others. But, if there is no soap and water around, hand sanitizers can also destroy the virus.

You may have heard rumors that alcohol-based hand sanitizers don't work against various illnesses, such as swine (H1N1) flu. But the CDC says using a hand sanitizer is a good way to fight this flu virus.

CDC advises washing your hands with soap and water, or using hand sanitizer, after touching surfaces that may be infected with the virus. The virus is thought to be able to live on surfaces for up to 2-8 hours.

- When washing hands, the CDC recommends using soap and warm water and washing for at least 20 seconds.

- If you use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer instead of soap and water, first wipe off any dirt from your hands. If you don't, it will decrease the effectiveness of the hand sanitizer. Next, apply the sanitizer and rub your hands until they are dry. The alcohol will kill the germs, so you don't need water.

Selecting a hand sanitizer

An alcohol-based hand sanitizer is a good weapon against the flu and other illnesses. But you should read the label before buying one.

The CDC recommends the use of hand sanitizers with 60 percent or higher alcohol (ethanol or isopropanol) to fight infection. Some discount stores may sell hand sanitizers with alcohol concentrations of less than 60 percent. These have been found to be less effective.

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