

## ECDC HEALTH INFORMATION

# Influenza A(H1N1) virus: how to protect yourself

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The influenza A(H1N1) virus that has recently been found is a new virus subtype of influenza affecting humans, which contains genes from pig, bird and human influenza viruses, in a combination that has never been observed before anywhere in the world. In addition there is every indication that this virus has been transmitting from human to human and the resulting illnesses have been severe in a substantial number of cases in Mexico. Outside Mexico the disease has been mild, and there has only been one severe case reported in the EU.

Symptoms of the influenza A(H1N1) in humans are usually similar to regular human seasonal influenza symptoms:

- Fever
- Respiratory symptoms such as cough or runny nose
- Sore throat
- Possibly other symptoms such as
  - Body aches (particularly muscle pain)
  - Headache
  - Chills
  - Fatigue
  - Vomiting or diarrhoea (not typical for influenza but reported by some of the recent cases of novel influenza)

In some cases, severe complications could occur even in normally healthy persons who become infected with the virus.

People become infected with the influenza A(H1N1) virus in the same way as for normal seasonal influenza. It spreads from person to person via droplets from an infected person who is coughing or sneezing; indirectly when droplets or secretions from the nose and throat settle on hands and other surfaces which then are touched by other people who touch their own mouth or nose.

The virus cannot be transmitted by eating properly handled and cooked pork or pork products. It is always recommended to follow proper food hygiene practices in kitchens and to wash hands and all surfaces and equipment with soap after handling raw meat.

The novel influenza virus is susceptible to neuraminidase inhibitors (oseltamivir and zanamivir).

### What can I do to protect myself from infection?

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick. When you are sick, keep your distance from others to protect them from getting sick too.
- Stay home from work, school, and avoid running errands when you are sick. This will help prevent others from catching your illness.

- Avoid crowds or mass gatherings.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. It may prevent those around you from getting sick. Throw the tissue in the bin after you use it.
- Wash your hands: this will help protect you from germs. Wash them often for at least 20 seconds with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners may also be effective.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth because germs are often spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose, or mouth.
- Clean hard surfaces, such as door handles, frequently using a normal cleaning product.
- Confirm a network of 'flu friends' – friends and relatives – who could help you if you fall ill.