



# Swine Flu (H1N1) and Influenza A:

## *Facts for Patients with Chronic Medical Illnesses*

The new virus, novel H1N1 influenza (also called “swine flu”) has created concern among patients and families with children who have chronic medical illnesses. We have prepared this information sheet to help you make sense of what this new virus may mean for you and your family.

### **Facts:**

- Last spring, the novel H1N1 influenza virus infected about 10 percent of residents in the Delaware Valley.
- Most people who get novel H1N1 influenza are sick for 3 to 5 days and then recover fully, including patients who have chronic illnesses. Only a very small number of patients become seriously ill. Last spring, there were fewer pediatric deaths from swine flu than from a typical seasonal flu outbreak.
- We think the novel H1N1 influenza virus may return to the Delaware Valley this fall or winter. We also think that the severity of illness will be similar to what happened during the spring.
- Certain groups of children who have chronic medical illnesses are at increased risk of complications when they have seasonal influenza infection. We suspect these same patients may have an increased risk of complications if they get novel H1N1 influenza.
- Chronic illnesses that may increase the risk of complications include:
  - unrepaired cardiac disease
  - chronic pulmonary conditions (excluding well-controlled, stable asthma)
  - neurological and neuromuscular conditions
  - immunosuppressed conditions (cancer, transplantation, HIV/AIDS)

### **How to keep your child with chronic illness healthy:**

Basic hygiene practices and common sense are the most important ways you can minimize the risk of your child getting novel H1N1 influenza. We recommend:

- Avoid contact with people who are sick.
- Make sure to clean your hands frequently.
- Avoid touching your face, eyes, nose or mouth.
- Cover your cough and dispose of used tissues promptly.
- Consider keeping your child home from school for several days if a large number of his or her classmates become ill.

### **Symptoms of novel H1N1 influenza:**

- Fever, chills • Aching muscles • Headache • General ill feeling • Stuffy nose • Sore throat • Dry cough • Vomiting or diarrhea

### **What to do if you suspect your child might have novel H1N1 influenza:**

First and foremost, remain calm. The symptoms of HINI flu are very similar to those of regular seasonal flu – most commonly fever and respiratory symptoms. Many children who are thought to have novel H1N1 influenza just have a common cold. In addition, the overwhelming majority of children with chronic medical illnesses have recovered fully from HINI flu.

### **Know when to contact your pediatrician or primary care provider:**

Call if your child has:

- an earache or ear discharge
- sinus pain or pressure
- symptoms that are getting worse

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### **Know when to contact your child's specialty care providers:**

Not all children with chronic medical illnesses require immediate evaluation if they develop a fever and respiratory symptoms. However, you may want to contact your child's specialty care provider to discuss whether evaluation is needed. Some children with chronic medical illnesses may be prescribed a medication to fight influenza. In addition, if the symptoms due to your child's chronic medical illness become worse, you may also want to contact your child's specialty care provider.

### **Know when to get emergency care:**

Most children with novel H1N1 influenza will NOT require emergency care, even if they have chronic medical conditions. There ARE some instances when you should go to the emergency room or call 911:

- Your child has difficulty breathing (breathing too hard or fast, or making grunting noises or wheezing)
- Your child is dehydrated: difficult to awaken, no urination in past 8 hours, dry mouth and lips

### **Know about at-home treatment:**

You can help your child feel more comfortable during the flu by taking these steps:

- You may use acetaminophen (Tylenol®, etc.) or ibuprofen (Advil®, Motrin®) for fever or aches and pains as long as your child's doctors have not advised against using these medicines. Follow the directions on the package.
- DO NOT GIVE ASPIRIN.
- If your child has a stuffy nose, use a cool mist vaporizer or salt water nose drops with bulb suctioning.
- Encourage your child to drink plenty of fluids.
- If your child has a sore throat, soft foods such as ice cream, pudding or mashed potatoes will be easier to swallow.
- Most over-the-counter cold medications are not helpful and actually may be dangerous for some children. Please discuss any medications with your doctor or nurse practitioner.

### **Know about going back to school:**

You can help your child get better faster and prevent the spread of H1N1 flu by taking these steps:

- Keep your child home from school for at least 24 hours after the fever is gone.
- Limit your child's contact with other people while s/he has the flu.

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Visit [chop.edu](http://chop.edu) for the most up-to-date information on H1N1.

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