



# AFA-CWA Bulletin

## Novel H1N1 Flu (aka Swine Flu)

August 28, 2009 update

### What is it?

Novel H1N1 flu is a viral infection first detected among people in the U.S. in April 2009. Originally, laboratory testing showed that the virus included many genes similar to those in influenza viruses normally found in North American pigs (swine). Later studies have shown that the virus actually includes genes from viruses that circulate among European and Asian pigs, as well as birds and humans. The virus has spread worldwide, and the World Health Organization (WHO) on June 11, 2009 declared that a Phase 6 pandemic<sup>1</sup> is underway. It is likely that the Novel H1N1 virus will continue to spread rapidly with global travel and the upcoming fall flu season in the Northern hemisphere.

### How serious is it?

Novel H1N1 flu illness ranges from mild to severe; most persons who have been sick have recovered without medical treatment, but hospitalizations and deaths have occurred. People at higher risk of serious complications include “pregnant women, persons who live with or provide care for infants aged <6 months, health-care and emergency medical services personnel, children and young adults aged 6 months–24 years, and persons aged 25–64 years who have medical conditions that put them at higher risk for influenza-related complications.”<sup>2</sup>

### How do I know if I am infected?

Symptoms of infection include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Diarrhea and vomiting have also been associated with swine flu. If you develop these symptoms, immediately contact your primary care physician or an infectious disease specialist, and seek emergency care if needed. If you would like further information or assistance, contact your AFA-CWA Employee Assistance Program representative.

### How can I protect myself?

Some countries have issued travel advisories, recommending that citizens not visit affected areas of the US, Mexico, and other countries. The protective measures outlined in this bulletin are especially important for our members who are based in affected areas, must work on flights to or from affected areas, or must work on flights connecting to those areas.

Wherever you fly, wash your hands frequently with soap and water or alcohol-based gels, particularly before eating and serving food and drinks. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth - germs spread that way. The CDC recommends<sup>3</sup> the following hand-hygiene techniques:

- A. When decontaminating hands with an alcohol-based hand rub, apply product to palm of one hand and rub hands together, covering all surfaces of hands and fingers, until hands are dry. ...
- B. When washing hands with soap and water, wet hands first with water ... and rub hands together vigorously for at least 15 seconds, covering all surfaces of the hands and fingers. Rinse hands with water and dry thoroughly with a disposable towel. Use towel to turn off the faucet... Avoid using hot water, because repeated exposure to hot water may increase the risk of dermatitis...

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<sup>1</sup> WHO pandemic phase descriptions - <http://www.who.int/entity/csr/disease/influenza/GIPA3AideMemoire.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> CDC. *Use of Influenza A (H1N1) 2009 Monovalent Vaccine: Recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP)*, 2009. MMWR 2009;58(No. RR-10), p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> CDC. *Guideline for Hand Hygiene in Health-Care Settings: Recommendations of the Healthcare Infection Control Practices Advisory Committee and the HICPAC/SHEA/APIC/IDSA Hand Hygiene Task Force*. MMWR 2002;51(No. RR-16), p. 32.

If you have cuts or open sores on your hands, you should wear gloves. This will prevent you from getting infected. However, you must still remember to not touch your face when wearing gloves and to wash your hands after you take your gloves off. If your gloves get torn, remove the old gloves, wash your hands, and put on a new pair.

If passengers or crew cough or sneeze while onboard, they should do so into their elbow or shoulder and wash their hands afterwards.

If you observe that a passenger has flu-like symptoms, encourage them to wear a face mask<sup>4</sup> if available and isolate them from other passengers, to the extent possible. When you are in contact with a potentially-infected passenger, AFA-CWA recommends that you wear a face mask<sup>4</sup> and gloves, if available.

If you are pregnant, you are at increased risk of influenza-related complications and your immunity can be suppressed. It is especially important for you to avoid exposure.

Avoid close contact with people and with potentially infected surfaces, to the extent possible.

Encourage your airline and pilots to turn up the air packs to "high" whenever possible, especially during ground operations when risk of infection is highest because people are active and in closer contact with each other when stowing bags. Maximizing the airflow to the cabin can reduce your risk of exposure to airborne viruses.

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that you stay home if you have flu-like symptoms, especially if you live in an area where swine flu infections have been reported. This is to protect you and to control the spread of disease.

**For the most up to date information, visit the CDC online at [www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/](http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/) and the World Health Organization at [www.who.int/csr/disease/swineflu/en/index.html](http://www.who.int/csr/disease/swineflu/en/index.html)**

**Detailed, specific guidance from CDC of special relevance to airlines and airline employees:**

- Interim Guidance for Airlines Regarding Flight Crews Arriving from Domestic and International Areas Affected by Swine Influenza, updated August 5, 2009, <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/guidance/air-crew-dom-intl.htm>
- Interim Recommendations for Facemask and Respirator Use to Reduce Novel Influenza A (H1N1) Virus Transmission, updated August 5, 2009, <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/masks.htm>
- CDC Recommendations for the Amount of Time Persons with Influenza-Like Illness Should be Away from Others, updated August 5, 2009, <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/guidance/exclusion.htm>
- CDC Novel H1N1 Vaccination Planning Q&A, updated August 10, 2009, <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/vaccination/statelocal/qa.htm>

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<sup>4</sup> A surgical mask will provide limited protection to the wearer from large droplets only, but is more useful as a way to limit the spread of virus particles from someone who is known or suspected to be ill with Novel H1N1 flu. The CDC has recommended that non-healthcare workers, under certain conditions, who are caring for persons with influenza-like illness wear an N95 (or better) disposable respirator, see <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/masks.htm>. The US National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) has published standards for respirator masks, N/R/P 95/99/100; these are summarized at <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/respsumm.html>. The European Union has two published standards, CE EN149:2001 (FFP 2/3) or EN143:2000 (P2), which are summarized in a document from a UK safety equipment distributor, [http://www.sba.co.uk/content/doc\\_11.pdf](http://www.sba.co.uk/content/doc_11.pdf). Masks should conform to these or comparable national/regional standards.