



Frequently Asked Questions on the H1N1 Influenza Virus

What is the H1N1 Influenza Virus?

The H1N1 Influenza virus (also referred to as swine flu) is an influenza virus that spreads from person-to-person. The H1N1 Influenza virus is the subtype of Influenza A virus which was the most common cause of human influenza infection in the 2009 global pandemic. The first cases of human infection with the H1N1 influenza virus were detected in April 2009.

The first cases of H1N1 Influenza Virus infection in Ghana were identified in the Ashanti Region where four students have died from the swine flu at the Kumasi Academy. A test carried out on nineteen students at the Kumasi Academy revealed that twelve tested positive for the H1N1 virus.

What are the signs and Symptoms of the H1N1 Influenza Virus Infection?

The main signs and symptoms of the H1N1 Influenza Virus Infection are: Sudden onset of fever ($> 38^{\circ}\text{C}$), chills, headache, general weakness, cough or sore throat and sometimes gastrointestinal symptoms such as nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea.

Emergency warning signs in children to seek immediate medical attention are: fast breathing or difficulty in breathing, bluish or gray skin color, not drinking enough fluids, severe or persistent vomiting, not waking up (sleepiness) or not interacting, irritable, the child does not want to be held, flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough.

How can Infection with the H1N1 Influenza Virus Spread?

Infection with the H1N1 Influenza Virus spreads mainly through droplet infection by inhaling air contaminated with the virus. Coughing, sneezing, touching respiratory droplets on yourself or another person, or an object, then touching mucus membranes (e.g., mouth, nose, eyes) without washing hands.

All respiratory secretions and body fluids including diarrhoea stools of infected patients are considered to be potentially infectious.

The virus has an incubation period of 1 - 4 days and has a high virulence if not diagnosed and treated on time.

How to protect yourself from getting infected with the H1N1 Influenza Virus Everyday actions that can help prevent the spread of H1N1 Influenza virus are:

1. Wash your hands regularly with soap and warm water, especially after coughing or sneezing.

2. Avoid hugging, kissing or shaking hands when greeting.
3. Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
4. Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands and avoid contact with sick people.
5. Stay at home from work, school or crowded places (limit your contact with other people as much as possible), seek medical advice immediately and keep a distance of at least 1 meter from other people if you have flu-like symptoms.

Are there Vaccines for the Prevention of H1N1 Virus Infection?

A number of vaccines had been used during the H1N1 pandemic in 2009. Systematic review and meta-analysis has reported on the immunogenicity and safety of the 2009 influenza A (H1N1) vaccine. No death or case report of Guillain-Barre syndrome was reported, and the vaccine, with or without adjuvant, appeared to be generally protective after one dose among patients older than 3 years.

Are there Medicines for the Treatment of H1N1 Virus?

Laboratory testing has found swine flu virus susceptible to a number of prescription antiviral drugs, namely, oseltamivir (Tamiflu) and zanamivir (Relenza). Other antiviral agents [(examples, amantadine (Symmetrel), rimantadine (Flumadine)] are not recommended because of recent resistance to other influenza strains documented over the past several years.

What is the FDA doing to Prevent H1N1 Virus Infection?

The FDA in collaboration with the Ghana Health Service and the World Health Organization are working on the shipment of safe, efficacious and good quality vaccines for use in the prevention of the H1N1 Influenza Virus infection in Ghana.

References

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