



*Palo Alto Medical  
Foundation*

A Sutter Health Affiliate

## **H1N1 Pandemic Flu: How Do I Take Care of a Sick Person?**

The H1N1 pandemic flu virus (once known as “swine flu”) is causing illness in people in the United States and in countries around the world. The symptoms of H1N1 pandemic flu are similar to the regular seasonal flu and may include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Symptoms of H1N1 may also include diarrhea and vomiting.

Below is information on what to do if you or a loved one becomes ill. PAMF bases its recommendations on guidelines from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and local public health authorities.

### **How does the flu virus spread?**

The flu virus is spread from person to person when droplets from a cough or sneeze from an infected person are propelled through the air and deposited on the mouth or nose of people nearby, or when someone touches a person or object containing respiratory droplets and then touches the mouth or nose before washing hands.

### **What should I do to care for a sick household member?**

- Contact the sick person’s doctor if he or she is severely ill (see “Warning Signs” below); if he or she has risk factors including asthma or other pulmonary disease, diabetes, heart disease, liver or kidney disease, or pregnancy; or he or she is less than 2 years of age. You may also want to contact the sick person’s doctor to find out about any special care, the possible need for a clinic visit or referral to the emergency room, or if the patient should take antiviral medication.
- Ensure that the sick person:
  - Minimizes the amount of time spent with others, including avoiding travel, and staying home from work or school at least 24 hours after they no longer have a fever (100 degrees F) or no longer have signs of a fever without using fever-reducing medicines (such as Tylenol)
  - Gets plenty of rest
  - Drinks clear fluids (such as water, broth, sports drinks, electrolyte beverages for infants, etc.) to keep from being dehydrated
  - Covers his or her coughs and sneezes
  - Wears a facemask when sharing common spaces with other household members, or when it is necessary to go out in public
- Watch for warning signs (listed below) that indicate you need to seek emergency medical care.
- Keep the sick person in a room separate from the common areas of the house with the door closed.
- Have the sick person wear a facemask if he or she needs to be in common areas of the house. (*Talk to your family’s doctor about the best use of facemasks and respirators.*)
- If possible, sick persons should use a separate bathroom than other household members, and this bathroom should be cleaned daily with household disinfectant.

### **What are warning signs of illness that require emergency medical care?**

In children, seek emergency medical care if the child:

- Is breathing fast or has trouble breathing

- Has a bluish or gray skin color
- Is not drinking enough fluids
- Experiences severe or persistent vomiting
- Is not waking up or not interacting
- Is so irritable that he or she does not want to be held
- Displays flu-like symptoms that improve but then return with fever and worsened cough

In adults, seek emergency medical care if you the person:

- Has difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Has pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Experiences sudden dizziness
- Is confused
- Experiences severe or persistent vomiting
- Displays flu-like symptoms that improve but then return with a fever and worsened cough

As a caregiver, how can I keep myself healthy?

- Avoid face-to-face contact with the sick person.
- When holding small children who are sick, place their chin on your shoulder so they do not cough in your face.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, or use an alcohol-based hand cleanser after you touch the sick person, handle tissues or do laundry.

*Note: If you are at high risk of getting the flu, are pregnant or are already sick, you should not be the designated caretaker and should avoid other members of the household who may be sick.*

How can I keep other household members healthy?

- The sick person should not have visitors other than caregivers.
- If possible, have only one adult caregiver and preferably not someone who is at high risk of severe illness from flu.
- All persons in the household should wash their hands often with soap and water, or use alcohol-based hand cleansers, including after every contact with the sick person or the person's room, bathroom or shared space.
- To avoid spreading the virus, use paper towels for drying hands or dedicate a different cloth towel for each household member.
- Maintain good ventilation in shared household spaces.
- Talk to your family's doctor about whether any household members should take antiviral medications to avoid getting the flu.

How should I maintain my home to minimize the spread of the flu virus?

- Throw away tissues and other disposable items used by the sick person. Wash your hands after handling these items.
- Keep surfaces clean by wiping them down with a household disinfectant.
- Linens, eating utensils and dishes belonging to those who are sick do not need to be cleaned separately, but these items should not be shared without washing them thoroughly first in a dishwasher or by hand.
- Wash linens by using household laundry soap, and tumble dry on a hot setting. Wash your hands with soap and water, or use an alcohol-based hand cleanser, after handling dirty laundry.