



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

TALKING POINTS

ON

**THE NOVEL H1N1
INFLUENZA VIRUS**

This publication was produced by the AI.COMM project, which is operated by AED. AI.COMM is funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development under contract number (GHS-I-00-03-00036, Task Order 3). This publication does not necessarily represent the views of USAID or the U.S. Government.

www.pandemicpreparedness.org
www.avianflu.aed.org

September 2009

INTRODUCTION

This publication contains a collection of “talking points” that address questions that communities, organizations, and their leaders might be asked in response to outbreaks of the novel H1N1 influenza virus. They are intended to provide guidance on how to answer these questions.

The points are organized into the following topic areas:

- **General Information on the Novel H1N1 Influenza Virus**
- **Symptoms and Diagnosis**
- **How to Limit the Transmission of the Novel H1N1 Influenza Virus**
- **If You are Sick with the Novel H1N1 Influenza Virus**
- **If You are Caring for Someone with the Novel H1N1 Influenza Virus**
- **Novel H1N1 Influenza Virus and High-Risk Groups**
- **Use of Antiviral Drugs Against Novel H1N1 Influenza Virus**
- **Use of Vaccines Against Novel H1N1 Influenza Virus**
- **Keeping Updated**

For additional and updated information, please visit the following websites:

www.pandemicpreparedness.org
www.who.int
www.cdc.gov

GENERAL INFORMATION ON THE NOVEL H1N1 INFLUENZA VIRUS

What is the novel H1N1 influenza virus?

- The novel H1N1 influenza virus is an influenza virus that is circulating around the world and caused global health officials to declare a pandemic in June 2009.
- It is an influenza A virus that has never before circulated among humans.

How contagious is the novel H1N1 influenza virus?

- Novel H1N1 influenza virus appears to be more contagious than seasonal influenza, and has been spreading fast, particularly among young people (from ages 10 to 35). The severity of the disease ranges from very mild symptoms to severe illnesses that can result in death.

How does the novel H1N1 influenza virus spread?

- The novel H1N1 influenza virus is spread by contact with the virus, such as breathing in the virus after sick people cough or sneeze, or touching objects – such as cups, telephones or door knobs – that have been touched by a sick person.
- H1N1 influenza can spread easily in places where there are many people close to each other, such as markets, schools, places of worship, and social gatherings. Even if people do not look sick, they can still spread the virus before they start showing symptoms.

SYMPTOMS AND DIAGNOSIS

What are the symptoms of the novel H1N1 influenza virus?

- ▶ The symptoms of novel H1N1 influenza are similar to those of regular, seasonal influenza, such as:
 - Coughing/sore throat
 - Fever higher than 38° C
 - Headache or body aches
 - Chills
 - Fatigue
 - Diarrhea and vomiting (this symptom is more common in children)
 - Sneezing or runny/stuffy nose
- ▶ Most people will have some—not all—of these symptoms.
- ▶ A person can spread the virus for several days before they feel sick. You cannot tell who has the virus by looking at them.
- ▶ So far, these symptoms have been mild in most people with novel H1N1 influenza, and they go away on their own within two weeks.

These symptoms seem like they could be caused by many different illnesses. How will people know whether they have novel H1N1 influenza virus?

- ▶ The only way to know for sure that you have H1N1 influenza is to get a test at the health care facility.

- It is recommended, however, that people should avoid going to the health care facility unless they have serious health care problems or complications, because health facilities will be overwhelmed by people seeking tests.
- In most cases, the H1N1 symptoms will go away on their own within two weeks.

What are the serious health problems and complications that people should watch for?

You should go to a health facility if you have any of these problems:

- Difficulty breathing
- Chest pain
- Coughing up blood
- Lips or skin turning blue
- Severe vomiting or diarrhea
- Not waking up
- Confusion (such as not recognizing family or friends)
- Seizures or shaking that cannot be controlled

Always bring a sick infant that is younger than two months and refuses to feed to the health care facility.

If you live in an area where malaria is common, you should always go to the health care facility if you have a fever.

HOW TO LIMIT THE TRANSMISSION OF NOVEL H1N1 INFLUENZA VIRUS

What can people do to limit the spread of the novel H1N1 influenza virus?

- ▶ There are four good ways to limit the novel H1N1 influenza virus from spreading.
 1. Wash hands with soap and water often, and regularly clean objects that sick people use – like phones, eating utensils, and door knobs.
 2. Always cover your mouth and nose with a cloth or tissue when you sneeze or cough. If you do not have a cloth or tissue, you can cough or sneeze into the crook of your elbow.
 3. Keep a safe distance from people who are sick – usually 2 meters or about three long steps away – and avoid public places where many people gather, such as markets, church or mosque, workplaces and schools.
 4. If someone in your family or household is sick, separate them from other members of the household.

What about using a mask?

- ▶ If you are caring for a sick person, you can wear a mask when you are in close contact with the ill person. Remember to dispose of it immediately after using it, and wash your hands thoroughly afterwards.
- ▶ If you are the one who is sick, wearing a mask, scarf, or other piece of clean cloth over your mouth and nose may protect others

from getting the novel H1N1 influenza virus, and protect you from other illnesses.

- ▶ If you wear a disposable mask over your nose and mouth, throw it away in a trash bin immediately after use. If you wear a cloth over your nose and mouth, wash it with soap and warm water immediately after use.

What does washing hands “thoroughly” mean?

Experts recommend that people follow these steps to wash their hands well:

- ▶ Wet hands with water
- ▶ Rub soap with hands
- ▶ Rub the palms together
- ▶ Rub the back of each hand with the other hand
- ▶ Wash the spaces between all fingers
- ▶ Wash under your nails
- ▶ Wash your wrists
- ▶ Rinse well with water

What about washing hands “often”? What does that mean?

- ▶ There are many times when it is helpful to wash your hands.
- ▶ With regard to H1N1, the two most important times are before and after caring for someone who is sick – so you can protect

yourself from their virus and protect them from other infections you could be carrying on your hands.

- ▶ You should also wash your hands after coughing, sneezing or blowing your nose.

Why should I avoid public places?

- ▶ Whenever there is a large group of people, especially if they are close together – such as in markets, church or mosque, workplaces and schools – there is a greater chance that the H1N1 virus will spread through the air.
- ▶ People who have the virus can give it to others who are close to them – within 2 meters or three large steps away – when they cough, sneeze, spit, speak or breathe. If people are touching many of the same things as a sick person, such as doorknobs or chairs and tables, they can also get the virus.
- ▶ That is why it is good to avoid places with many people gathered together. Try to avoid crowded public transportation, and travel during off-peak hours if possible.

IF YOU ARE SICK WITH NOVEL H1N1 INFLUENZA VIRUS

Are there specific things I can do if I become sick with novel H1N1 influenza virus?

- If you are showing symptoms of the flu, stay at home, rest, and drink plenty of fluids.
- Do not go to work or school, and avoid public gatherings if you can, so you can avoid spreading the virus to others.
- Even at home, you should rest in a separate room, away from others in the household.

What if I can't stay at home?

- If you must leave your home, wear a mask or cloth over your mouth and nose.
- At all times, you should try to keep yourself separate from others – at least 2 meters or three large steps away – for at least one day after your fever is gone. This means the fever is gone without the use of fever-reducing medicines.

Besides staying away from others, what else can I do if I have the novel H1N1 influenza virus?

Always remember to cover your nose and mouth with a tissue or cloth when coughing and sneezing. If you do not have a tissue close by when you cough or sneeze, cover your mouth as much as possible with the crook of your elbow.

IF YOU ARE CARING FOR SOMEONE WHO IS SICK WITH NOVEL H1N1 INFLUENZA VIRUS

What can I do if someone in my family gets novel H1N1 influenza virus?

- As soon as symptoms develop, you should make sure that the sick person stays at home and rests.
- Keep them separate from others in the household – in a separate room or in a space that is at least 2 meters (three large steps) away from others. Try to limit visitors to the sick person.
- It is best to have only one person in the family take care of the sick person to prevent others in the household from getting sick.
- The person chosen as the caregiver should ideally be healthy and not have medical conditions that would put him or her at risk for severe influenza disease.
- Pregnant women also should avoid caring for those who are sick with H1N1 influenza.

How do you protect yourself and your family members if someone in the household has novel H1N1 influenza virus?

- If you are caring for a person with influenza, take care of your own health first. If you become sick, you will be of little use to those who need you.

- Wear a mask or cloth over your mouth and nose whenever you are within an arm's length of the sick person.
- After contact with a sick person or anything the sick person has touched, wash your hands with soap and water.
- Place tissues used by the sick person in a bag and throw them away with other household waste. Consider placing a bag at the bedside for this purpose.

Is there any other special cleaning I should do?

- Wash soiled dishes and eating utensils with warm water and soap. It is not necessary to wash eating utensils used by a sick person separately from other utensils.
- Wash laundry with water and detergent. It is not necessary to separate soiled linen and laundry used by someone with influenza from other household laundry. When doing laundry, do not hold the laundry close to your body or face.
- Wash your hands with soap and water after handling soiled laundry.

How should I take care of symptoms people with novel H1N1 influenza virus may have?

- Staying home and resting is the most important thing a person can do. Rest will improve the chances that they will recover from the illness quickly.

- It is also important to make sure sick people keep drinking fluids so they do not become dehydrated.

How do I know if someone is dehydrated?

- Some signs of dehydration are weakness or unresponsiveness, dry mouth and tongue, producing a decreased amount of urine, or having dark urine.
- You can also check for dehydration by lightly pinching some skin on the belly of a child or the upper chest of an adult, then let go. If the person has enough fluid, the skin will flatten out again right away. If the person is dehydrated, the skin will stay stretched up in the shape of the pinch for a few seconds.

What should I do if a person shows these signs of dehydration?

- If the person is very weak or shows the signs of dehydration, give them oral rehydration solution according to instructions on the packet, or clear drinks available in the home.
- Watch for an increase in urination, a lighter color of the urine, and improvement in the person's overall condition. These are signs that the increased fluids are working.
- Babies that are dehydrated can continue to be breastfed.

What about treating a high fever?

- Fever is a sign that the body is fighting the infection. It will go away as the person is getting better. Until that happens, you can keep the sick person in clean, dry, and loose clothing. If the person is chilled, cover them with a blanket. If the person is very hot, loosen their clothing.
- Sponging with lukewarm water may lower the sick person's temperature, but only during the period of sponging. Do not sponge with alcohol.
- If you have it, give medicine such as ibuprofen, paracetamol, or acetaminophen every six hours. This medicine can also help with body aches and pains. Do not use aspirin in children or teenagers with influenza because it can cause Reye's syndrome, a life-threatening illness.

How about treating a sore throat or cough?

- To soothe a sore throat, have the sick person gargle with hot salt water or drink hot tea or hot water. If you have it, use ibuprofen or acetaminophen for the pain.

What about treating nasal, sinus or ear congestion?

- To treat congestion, have the sick person breathe in the steam from a pot of hot water. If you have it, add a few drops of eucalyptus oil to help clear congestion.

What about nausea or vomiting?

- If the sick person is vomiting, do not give them any fluid or food for at least one hour. Let the stomach rest. After that, offer water in very small amounts until the person can drink more.
- If the sick person is not eating solid foods, give them fluids that contain sugars and salts, such as oral rehydration solution, broths, or soups.
- Babies that are nursing can continue to be breastfed if they are vomiting.

What about breastfeeding? Should I stop if I am ill?

- **No**, not unless your health care provider advises it. Breastfeeding provides the best overall nutrition for babies and increases their defense factors to fight illness.

NOVEL H1N1 INFLUENZA VIRUS AND HIGH-RISK GROUPS

Are there any other recommendations for pregnant women?

- ▶ **Yes.** This is because there seems to be a higher risk of serious complications in women who are pregnant and infected with novel H1N1 influenza virus, especially in the second and third trimesters.
- ▶ Therefore, pregnant women should avoid situations where they could be exposed to novel H1N1 influenza virus, such as large social gatherings.
- ▶ Pregnant women who work in health care facilities should try to avoid patients with known or suspected infection with the novel H1N1 influenza virus, and if possible, ask to be assigned tasks that do not involve being near people with the novel H1N1 influenza virus. If pregnant health care workers cannot avoid being near people with the novel H1N1 influenza virus, they should cover their mouth and nose with a mask.
- ▶ In areas where H1N1 influenza is widespread, pregnant women should pay attention to symptoms of influenza-like illness and tell their health care provider if they suspect they might have the novel H1N1 influenza virus.

Besides pregnant women, are there people who are more at risk of serious influenza illness if they are infected by the novel H1N1 influenza virus?

- ▶ **Yes,** there are some people who seem to be at greater risk for illness and death from H1N1 influenza, such as older people and young children.

- People who already have a health problem – such as tuberculosis or other lung diseases, HIV/AIDS, diabetes, heart problems, and kidney disease – are at higher risk of major health problems related to the novel H1N1 influenza virus.
- As with pregnant women, people with HIV and other serious illnesses should avoid situations where they could be exposed to H1N1. If they need to go out in public, they should cover their mouth and nose with a mask or cloth. If they are currently taking medications for a pre-existing illness, they should continue to take them and follow their doctor's orders. For example, if you have HIV or AIDS and are taking medicines to prevent infections, continue with your prescribed treatment and follow the advice of your health care provider to keep your immune system healthy.

What about people who live in areas with avian influenza outbreaks or people who work with poultry?

- People who live in areas with avian influenza (H5N1 virus) outbreaks should pay special attention when they have flu symptoms.
- If you live in an area with avian influenza outbreaks and you have flu symptoms, you should visit your health care facility to find out if you have avian influenza.
- So far, the avian flu virus (H5N1) has been shown to be more severe in people than the novel H1N1 influenza virus, and you will not be able to tell the difference between avian flu and the pandemic flu without medical help.

- ▶ You can become infected with the novel H1N1 influenza virus without being in contact with birds, pigs or any other animals. It is spread from person to person.
- ▶ If you work with poultry, you should continue to take steps to prevent outbreaks of avian flu, such as keeping the farmyard clean, keeping poultry separated from other animals, and washing your hands with soap and water before and after contact with poultry.

What about pigs? Is it safe to be around pigs or to eat pork?

- ▶ **Yes**, it is safe to be around pigs, as the novel H1N1 influenza virus is spread from person to person, and not from pig to human.
- ▶ The H1N1 virus also has not been shown to be spread to people through eating properly handled and prepared pork (pig meat) or other products made from pigs. The novel H1N1 influenza virus is killed by cooking temperatures of 160°F/70°C.

How will it be decided that schools should be closed?

- ▶ In most cases, school administrators will decide whether schools will be closed due to a high risk of the novel H1N1 influenza virus spreading there.
- ▶ School workers and students should always cooperate with decisions to close schools or any other decisions made by school administrators.

What if people become ill while they are in school?

- Global health authorities have recommended that students and school workers who have flu symptoms should be sent to a room separate from others until they can be sent home. If possible, they should wear a mask, and have those who care for ill students and staff wear a mask.
- School workers and students with flu symptoms should stay home for at least 24 hours after they no longer have a fever, without the use of fever-reducing medicines.

What else should schools do to avoid the spread of the novel H1N1 influenza virus?

- Schools should encourage their students and staff to stay home when they are sick, to wash their hands frequently with soap and water, and to cover their noses and mouths with a tissue or cloth when they cough or sneeze – or use the crook of their elbow if no tissue is available.
- School staff should regularly clean areas that students and staff touch often with the cleaners they typically use. Special cleaning with bleach and other non-detergent-based cleaners is not necessary.

How will I know whether I should travel?

- ▶ If you are feeling unwell or have symptoms of novel H1N1 influenza virus, you should avoid travel, if possible.
- ▶ If you are travelling to an area with widespread outbreaks of H1N1, take precautions such as always covering your mouth and nose with a tissue or cloth when coughing or sneezing, washing your hands frequently with soap and water, and keeping at least a 2-meter distance (or three large steps) from other people.
- ▶ Wherever you travel, it will be important to observe and follow the rules from the local health authorities. You should also expect additional health screening procedures at airports.

USE OF ANTIVIRAL DRUGS AGAINST NOVEL H1N1 INFLUENZA VIRUS

Can antiviral drugs be used for H1N1?

- There are two antiviral drugs that have been shown to be effective for novel H1N1 influenza virus: oseltamivir and zanamivir.
- These antiviral drugs may reduce the symptoms and duration of illness, just as they do for seasonal influenza.
- So far, most people who have novel H1N1 influenza virus have recovered without antiviral treatment.

Should I take an antiviral now just in case I catch the novel H1N1 influenza virus?

- **No.** You should only take an antiviral, such as oseltamivir or zanamivir, if your health care provider advises you to do so.
- Otherwise-healthy people with no complications do not need to be treated with antivirals.

How do doctors decide when these antiviral drugs should be used?

- Where antiviral drugs are available for treatment, clinicians should make decisions based on assessment of the individual patient's risk.
- WHO recommends that people with severe illness or whose condition begins to worsen quickly should receive oseltamivir as soon as possible.

What if these drugs are not available in my area?

- ▶ The World Health Organization (WHO) has been working to provide an emergency stock of antiviral drugs to countries that have a small stock – or no stock – of the drugs and cannot procure these drugs themselves.
- ▶ WHO is also working with Member States, donors and other groups that have stockpiles and are willing to share these with WHO for distribution to countries in need.
- ▶ You can check the WHO website (www.who.int) for the most updated list of the antiviral distribution plan.

USE OF VACCINES AGAINST H1N1 INFLUENZA

Is an effective vaccine against the novel H1N1 influenza virus already available?

- ▶ A vaccine for the novel H1N1 influenza virus has been cleared for use by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration as of September 2009.

When will I be able to get the vaccine?

- ▶ The exact date the vaccine will be available in various parts of the world is not yet known. Because this is a rapidly changing situation, it is best to consult with the World Health Organization web site, www.who.int, for the most current information about vaccine availability and supply.

When the vaccine becomes available in my area, how can I receive a vaccination?

- ▶ Once the first doses of the H1N1 vaccine become available, national health authorities will decide how to implement national vaccination campaigns.

Who will receive priority for vaccination?

- ▶ As of September 2009, WHO recommends that pregnant women and health care workers worldwide should be immunized first. This is because health care workers will have the most contact with people who are ill with the virus, and because pregnant women are most likely to suffer serious health complications from the virus. In the end, national authorities will identify the priority groups for vaccination based on circumstances within each country.

Will there be enough novel H1N1 influenza virus vaccine for everyone?

- ▶ When the pandemic vaccine first becomes available, the demand for it will probably be greater than the supply. It is hoped that this gap will narrow as more vaccine becomes available over time.
- ▶ Do not worry if you cannot obtain the novel H1N1 influenza virus vaccine. Other practices such as regular hand washing, covering coughs and sneezes, and staying away from people who are sick are also effective to prevent getting sick.

Will developing countries have access to the novel H1N1 influenza virus vaccine?

- ▶ WHO has requested that manufacturers set aside H1N1 vaccines for developing country populations, through donations or affordable pricing arrangements. To obtain the most updated information on distribution to developing countries, view the WHO web site, www.who.int.

Besides getting the vaccine, is there anything else that health care workers can do to protect themselves?

- ▶ During a local outbreak of novel H1N1 influenza virus, health care workers should treat all patients who arrive at their facility with flu-like symptoms as having the novel H1N1 influenza virus and protect themselves.

- Health care workers should wear facemasks over their nose and mouth when they are caring for patients with flu-like symptoms. They should also have patients with flu-like symptoms wear a mask or cloth over their nose and mouth.
- If possible, they should place patients with flu-like symptoms in a room separate from other patients, or at least 2 meters away from others. And remind patients to cover their coughs and sneezes with a tissue, and to wash their hands with soap and water often – especially after coughing or sneezing. They should dispose of used tissues along with other medical waste, away from people.
- Most important, health care workers should remember to wash their hands with soap and water before and after caring for a person with flu-like symptoms. They should also regularly clean areas that have come in contact with sick patients.

KEEPING UPDATED

How do I keep up to date on what is happening with the novel H1N1 influenza virus?

- Everyone should pay attention to announcements from local leaders, radio, television, or hotlines to keep up to date on what actions you should take.
- You should especially listen for instructions on public events that are cancelled or schools that are closed.
- Information is also available at websites such as **www.pandemicpreparedness.org**, **www.who.int** and **www.cdc.gov**.

