



NEWS RELEASE

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Back to School: Know What to Do About the Flu

Right now, parents everywhere are preparing for a new school year, finding out who their children's teachers will be, buying school supplies, and seeing their health care providers to make sure their children are healthy and ready to learn.

But if you're a parent, you need to add one more item to that back-to-school checklist: what to do if someone in your family gets the flu. This fall—as every fall—we not only have to plan for a new version of seasonal influenza, but in addition, another potentially serious strain, the 2009 H1N1 flu virus.

We first saw the new H1N1 virus in the U.S. last April, but the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) continues to report higher than normal levels of flu-like illness with continuing H1N1 outbreaks in some parts of the country. That's very unusual at this time of year.

CDC estimates we've had more than 1 million cases of H1N1 in the United States. Similar to seasonal flu, with H1N1 you'll get a fever, cough, sore throat, stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills, and fatigue. Sometimes H1N1 causes diarrhea and vomiting. And just like seasonal flu, it can be severe and potentially deadly.

H1N1 can be especially dangerous for a person with an underlying medical condition—such as asthma or diabetes—or if you're pregnant. So far, it's been most contagious among children and young adults ages 6 months to 24 years. Health care workers, emergency responders, and people caring for infants should be on guard to avoid getting sick themselves and spreading it to others.

Scientists believe this virus could worsen with the arrival of school when large groups of young people are gathering together. But if we prepare for the virus now, we can help prevent serious outbreaks. Some precautions to prevent infection are simple and personal. Make it a routine to wash your hands often with soap and water. Cough into your elbow or into a tissue, not in your hands.

Stay home if you're sick, except to get medical care or other necessities, and start planning now in the event that your child gets the flu. Ask yourself these questions. Have I made arrangements for child care? Have I talked with my employer about what to do in case I need to be out to care for a family member?

Some preparations are community-wide. If you're an employer, now is the time to plan to meet your objectives with a reduced staff. Help educate your staff on ways to prevent spread of infection. You do not want an employee who is ill to spread flu in the workplace.

At the national level, scientists at the National Institutes of Health, the CDC, and the Food and Drug Administration are working with vaccine manufacturers to make sure that an H1N1 vaccine is not only safe, but that the virus is not changing in ways that would reduce a vaccine's effectiveness. They expect to have a vaccine ready this fall.

If you want more information, please visit www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu or www.michigan.gov/flu. These sites provide guidance to prepare for, prevent, and respond to an outbreak. No one knows what the impact of the fall flu season will be until we're in the middle of it. But how severe the flu becomes this fall will depend on how seriously each of us takes action to reduce the risk now.

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