

# Frequently Asked Questions about H1N1 Flu for PreK Child Care Providers

November 11, 2009

## **What is the most important step toward preventing the spread of H1N1 flu?**

The best protection against H1N1 flu is to get vaccinated.

**What are the symptoms of H1N1 flu?** Fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue, and sometimes diarrhea and vomiting. Cough alone does not indicate influenza. It will be very hard to tell if someone has H1N1 or seasonal flu.

## **Which groups are at highest risk for complications from H1N1 flu?**

- Children younger than 5 years of age (especially those under 2)
- Pregnant women
- Children 5 to 18 years old with underlying health conditions

**Should children get vaccinated for H1N1 and seasonal flu?** All children over the age of 6 months should get the vaccine for both H1N1 and seasonal flu, when it is available.

## **Should child care center staff get vaccinated for H1N1 and seasonal flu?**

Child care center staff who care for children 6 months or younger, or are pregnant are considered a priority for H1N1 vaccination. Those that are under 24 years old or have a health condition that increases the risk for complications of the flu should also get immunized when vaccine becomes available. Later we hope to have H1N1 vaccine available to everyone. It is also recommended that all child care providers be vaccinated for seasonal flu.

## **Is the H1N1 vaccine safe?**

Vaccine has saved more lives than any other single technology in modern medicine. It is recognized that no vaccine is without side effect or risks. In general, the risks are extremely small. Influenza vaccines have been widely used for many years and are very safe. The new H1N1 vaccine was made the same way and has undergone even more safety tests than the usual seasonal flu vaccine. It is expected to be just as safe. The potential benefits of H1N1 vaccination far outweigh the risks.

## **What other steps should be taken to keep children and staff from getting sick with the flu?**

- Teach age-appropriate children to cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or cough into their arm (elbow), as well as keep toys and supplies out of their mouth.
- Provide teaching, assistance, time, and easily accessible supplies for thorough and frequent hand washing.
- Promptly separate sick children from the others until they can be sent home. Staff should also go home at the onset of flu symptoms.
- Consider finding ways to increase the space between children.
- Limit children who mouth toys to a specific toy (not to be shared).

## **Can the flu virus live on hard surfaces, such as toys, supplies, tables, and playground equipment?**

Yes. Flu virus may spread for up to 8 hours when a child touches droplets left on hard surfaces by coughs and sneezes. Frequent hand washing helps reduce the chance of becoming infected when coming in contact with a contaminated surface.

**How should these surfaces be cleaned?**

Child care providers should routinely clean areas that are touched by children and staff, using cleaners that are typically used. No special disinfection is considered necessary. This is a good time to review cleaning procedures with staff.

**Is it advisable for children to stop sharing toys and supplies?**

We advise that the focus be on good hand washing prior to the use of shared items to reduce the chance of becoming infected when coming in contact with a contaminated surface. Children can share toys and supplies as they have done in the past.

**What are the exclusion guidelines for children and staff with flu symptoms?**

Children and staff with flu symptoms need to stay home until the fever is gone for at least 24 hours. Fever is defined as 100 degrees or greater without the use of fever-reducing medicine.

**Do children or staff members need a note from a doctor to return to the childcare setting?**

No. Most people with flu will not be seeing a doctor unless they have severe symptoms.

**Do child care centers need to report cases of H1N1 to Public Health - Madison & Dane County (PHMDC)?**

Child care centers and schools do not need to report cases of H1N1 to PHMDC, and most people with flu-like illness will not be tested to confirm if they have the illness.

**What can we do to teach parents about precautions that limit the spread of illness?**

Encourage families to vaccinate their children for H1N1 and seasonal flu. Focus on the ABCDs of prevention:

**A**void touching your mouth, nose and eyes.

**B**e sure to wash your hands frequently.

**C**over your cough and sneeze with a tissue or cough into your elbow.

**D**on't come to childcare, school or work if you are ill.

Many resources and posters for parents and child care providers are listed on this webpage

<http://www.publichealthmdc.com/disease/swineflu/ChildCare.cfm>

**NOTE: Influenza is unpredictable.** Public Health - Madison & Dane County will post updates on their website (<http://www.publichealthmdc.com/disease/swineflu/index.cfm>)

as more information is known or additional strategies are needed.