

Swine Flu vs. Seasonal Flu: Be Prepared

August 13 2009

It hit in April but continues to wreak havoc locally and globally. H1N1 -- also known as swine flu -- has sickened over 43,000 people nationwide and it's not disappearing anytime soon, says University of Cincinnati infectious diseases expert Judith Feinberg, MD.

“There have been continued outbreaks throughout the United States this spring and summer,” Feinberg says. “Currently, there are huge outbreaks in Argentina and the Southern Hemisphere, in general. I think it's safe to say it's going to hit harder everywhere this fall when the true flu season rolls around.”

Feinberg says that usually influenza is most dangerous for the very young and the very old—groups that have weaker immune systems and are unable to fight off infections.

But with H1N1, there is no built-up immunity in the population, and she predicts there will be more young, healthy adults struck by the illness.

“H1N1 is an unusual [flu strain](#), with elements of avian, swine and [human influenza](#),” she says. “There have been ranges of disease from mild to lethal, and we are expecting to see more.”

But how do the symptoms of H1N1 differ from those of the regular flu—which affects 25 to 50 million Americans yearly—and what precautions can one take to avoid infection?

Feinberg says symptoms for both H1N1 and seasonal influenza seem to

be quite similar and include:

- Sore throat
- Fever
- Headache
- Muscle ache and soreness
- Congestion
- Cough
- [Vomiting](#) and [diarrhea](#), linked more closely to H1N1 but can be experienced with either bug

“Primarily, influenza is airborne, and both viruses enter your body through the mucous membranes of your nose and mouth,” Feinberg says. “It is very important to keep your hands germ-free with frequent washing.”

Eric Warm, MD, a primary care doctor with UC Physicians, states that alcohol-based hand sanitizers can fight many types of bacteria, including multidrug-resistant pathogens, but are not always the best option for hand cleansing.

”Alcohol-based gels are not appropriate for use when hands are visibly dirty or contaminated,” he says.

In addition to washing hands frequently, Feinberg and Warm say there are other ways to take everyday actions to stay healthy, including:

- Covering your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze and throwing the tissue in the trash after you use it
- Avoiding touching your eyes, nose or mouth
- Staying home if you get sick
- Seeing your general practitioner as soon as possible if you experience symptoms to avoid further spread of the illness

Concern over the risk of more infection is prompting the rush to develop a vaccine against the emerging H1N1 flu strain.

Researchers at UC and Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center are working to test two experimental vaccines. They are recruiting volunteers this month.

“Vaccines are the most powerful public health tool of any kind for control of influenza,” says David Bernstein, MD, professor of pediatrics at UC, director of [infectious diseases](#) at Cincinnati Children's and lead local investigator for the trials. “Working with the National Institutes of Health, we will be testing vaccines from two manufacturers who have been working hard to develop a vaccine that can be available for the upcoming flu season.

Testing includes regular seasonal flu vaccines, along with the two experimental H1N1 vaccines. Researchers also hope to determine whether the seasonal and H1N1 vaccines can be given in combination or within a short period of time.

“We need to confirm that the H1N1 and seasonal vaccine will be safe and effective if given at the same time or closely together,” Bernstein says, noting that the seasonal vaccine will probably be available first and that people should get the shot as soon as possible.

In late July, the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices said those first in line for the [H1N1](#) vaccine should be (in order of importance):

- Pregnant women
- Health care workers in contact with infants under 6 months old and emergency medical services workers
- Children and young adults, ages 6 months through 24 years of age

- People under 65 years old with underlying medical conditions
- The remainder of the population

“The unusual aspect to swine flu is that it can strike younger, otherwise healthy adults,” Feinberg says. “[Swine flu](#) vaccinations will help in protecting against the virus.”

Provided by University of Cincinnati ([news](#) : [web](#))

Citation: Swine Flu vs. Seasonal Flu: Be Prepared (2009, August 13) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2009-08-swine-flu-seasonal.html>

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