

Don't Rush To The Emergency Room If You Think You Have 'Swine Flu'

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(PhysOrg.com) -- You wake up a bit dizzy with a headache. By the time you dress and arrive at work, your throat is sore and your nose is runny. You're running a slight temperature. Could it be H1N1 flu? Should you rush to the emergency room?

Health-care officials fear that many people panicked by thoughts of H1N1 [flu](#) will do just that and overtax emergency departments' abilities to care for patients across the nation this coming [flu season](#) when in all likelihood their illnesses could be best treated at home.

"When you are sick with the flu or any other contagious illness, the best thing to do is stay home, rest and avoid contact with other people as much as possible," said Dr. Mark Cichon, director of emergency medical services at Loyola University Health System in Maywood. "If you think you have H1N1, call your physician or a health-care advice line first. They can determine if an examination, influenza testing or treatment is needed."

Besides easing the strain on the health-care system, avoiding a visit to an emergency room carries an additional benefit to those who think they have the flu, said Dr. Jamie Belmares-Avalos, assistant professor of medicine, infectious diseases, Stritch School of Medicine. Infectious diseases like H1N1 can be easily transmitted from person to person in crowded public places.

"Emergency rooms are prime locations for picking up and passing on

germs so avoid going there unless you have a real medical emergency," Belmares-Avalos said.

H1N1 flu is also known as the [swine flu](#). Its symptoms are similar to regular seasonal flu -- fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people also have diarrhea and vomiting. Most will recover from both varieties of the flu in a few days, although they may experience fatigue for several weeks.

For some people, though, flu is a much more serious illness that requires hospitalization. In extreme cases, the flu can lead to pneumonia or death. There are some warning signs that require emergency medical treatment. For children these include:

- * Rapid or difficulty breathing
- * Not drinking enough fluids
- * Extreme lethargy
- * Not waking up
- * High fever with flu-like symptoms and a rash (which may improve only to return)
- * Bluish skin color

In adults, emergency warning signs include:

- * Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- * Pain in the chest or abdomen

- * Sudden dizziness and confusion

- * Severe vomiting or diarrhea

- * Confusion

"If you have none of those symptoms, you have no need to seek emergency care," Cichon said. "A key rule to follow is if you have symptoms that wouldn't normally cause you to go to an [emergency room](#), you probably don't need to go to one. If you still have some concerns, the best thing to do is consult your family practitioner."

Widespread H1N1 activity has already been reported in Illinois and 20 other states, according to the Centers for Disease Control. Reports of widespread influenza activity in September are very unusual. As usual, prevention is the best strategy. Here are effective prevention measures:

- * Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.

- * Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hands cleaners are also effective.

- * Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread that way.

- * Use disinfectants on frequently touched surfaces. Germs can also be spread when a person touches an infected surface and then touches their own eyes, mouth or nose.

Provided by Loyola University Health System ([news](#) : [web](#))

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