

September 30, 2009

Who should get tested and treated for H1N1 (“swine”) flu?

This flu season, there are **two types of flu circulating in our area**: regular seasonal flu, and novel H1N1 influenza A, otherwise known as H1N1 or “swine” flu.

Doctors in our area will not be testing most people who get flu-like illness to see which type of flu they have, because current rapid flu tests are not reliable. But some people will get tested.

Testing for flu is recommended for:

- People who have been admitted to a hospital for flu-like illness
- People who have come to their doctor’s office or other health facility because of flu-like symptoms, and who are going to be admitted immediately to the hospital
- People whose doctors are participating in efforts to monitor the flu outbreak in our area
- Some health care workers who have had flu-like illness but are feeling better, and may be able to return to work before the seven-day recommended period ends, if they are no longer infected

Most people who get flu-like illness will be able to recover within a few days. They will not need the help of anti-viral medicines such as Tamiflu. However, some people need these medicines to help them fight off the flu and prevent worse problems. Doctors need to reserve these medicines for them.

Treatment with antiviral medicines is recommended for:

- Anyone who has severe symptoms, or who has been hospitalized for flu-like illness, or who has tested positive for H1N1 flu after being admitted to the hospital
- Children under 2 years who get the flu
- People over age 65 who get the flu
- Pregnant women who get the flu
- Adults and children who have certain chronic diseases and who get the flu or have close contact with someone who does. The diseases are:
 - Lung disease, including asthma and emphysema
 - Heart disease and other cardiovascular conditions
 - Kidney, liver and blood diseases (including sickle cell disease)
 - Diabetes and other metabolic disorders
 - Neuromuscular and developmental disorders
- Adults and children who get the flu and either have a disease that reduces their immune system’s ability to fight off an infection, or are on medications that do so, such as chemotherapy.
- Residents of nursing homes or other chronic care facilities who have a flu
- Children and teens under 19 who are receiving long-term aspirin therapy
- Health care workers who didn’t wear protective gear during close contact with a flu patient

For individuals in the above groups, antiviral medicine can prevent life-threatening flu-related illness.

You do not have to have a positive test for flu to start receiving anti-viral medicine. In fact, it’s important to start treatment with these medicines within the first day or two after flu-like symptoms begin! That’s when they work best. **If you or your child fit any of these groups, call your doctor’s office immediately about any fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills or fatigue.**

For anyone who is seriously ill, and has trouble breathing, blue or purple lips, uncontrollable vomiting, dizziness or confusion, signs of dehydration, convulsions (seizures) or lack of responsiveness, seek emergency treatment.

This is a consensus statement supported by officials from all major health institutions in Washtenaw County, Michigan: the Huron Valley Physicians Association, Chelsea Community Hospital, IHA, the St. Joseph Mercy Health System, the University of Michigan Health System, the Washtenaw County Medical Society and Washtenaw County Public Health.