

FACTS ABOUT FLU

This fact sheet is based on CDC's best current information. It may be updated as new information becomes available.

Marion County's Public Information and Rumor Control phone line: (503) 391-7294

Marion County Health Department Phone Bank: (503) 584-4870

Marion County Health Department flu website: <http://www.co.marion.or.us/HLT/PH/Epid/flu/>

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1) What is influenza (the flu)?

- Influenza (the flu) is a contagious respiratory illness caused by the influenza virus.
- It can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death.
- In April of this year, a new type of flu (the H1N1 “swine”) virus started causing illness in people and is now causing a pandemic (illness around the world).
- We have seen cases of this new virus in Marion County since May.

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2) Why is novel H1N1 virus sometimes called “swine flu”?

- This virus was originally referred to as “swine flu” because laboratory testing showed that many of the genes in this new virus were very similar to influenza viruses that normally occur in pigs (swine) in North America.

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3) Is novel H1N1 virus contagious?

- Yes, novel H1N1 virus is contagious and is spreading from person to person.

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4) How does novel H1N1 virus spread?

- Spread of novel H1N1 virus is thought to occur in the same way that seasonal flu spreads. Flu viruses are spread from person to person through coughing or sneezing by people with influenza. Sometimes people may become infected by touching something – such as a surface or object – with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose.

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5) What are the signs and symptoms of the H1N1 virus in people?

- Fever of 100 degrees Fahrenheit or greater
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Body aches
- Headaches
- Chills
- Tiredness
- Sometimes diarrhea and vomiting

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6) How serious is the flu?

- Flu, including the novel H1N1 flu, can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death.
- Every year in the United States, up to one in five people, or 20%, get the flu; more than 200,000 people are hospitalized for flu complications, and about 36,000 people die from flu-related causes.
- Currently, the novel H1N1 flu *does not appear* to be any more severe than seasonal flu.

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7) Who is most at risk for complications?

- Every year during the winter, seasonal flu spreads through out Marion County.
- Some people, such as older people, young children, and people with certain chronic health conditions, are at higher risk for serious complications from the flu.
- *The new H1N1 flu is different from the seasonal flu in that mostly children and young adults are infected by it. People 65 years and older appear to have some immunity to the new virus due to exposure to the flu viruses that were common between 1918 and 1957.*
- With **any** flu (seasonal or the novel H1N1 flu), children under the age of 5 years, pregnant women, people of any age with underlying medical conditions such as asthma, diabetes, other conditions affecting the heart, lungs, blood, liver or kidneys, people with weakened immune systems, and people age 65 years and older are more likely to get complications *if infected*.
- If any person in these groups experience flu-like symptoms, he or she should seek out medical attention as soon as possible.

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8) How does novel H1N1 flu compare to seasonal flu in terms of its severity and infection rates?

- Each year in the United States, on average 36,000 people die from flu-related complications and more than 200,000 people are hospitalized from flu-related causes.
- Since few people have immunity to the novel H1N1 virus, more people may get sick and this may lead to an increased number of hospitalizations and deaths.
- The novel H1N1 flu has caused greater disease infection rates in people younger than 25 years of age than in older people.
- Pregnancy and other previously recognized high risk medical conditions from seasonal influenza appear to be associated with increased risk of complications from this novel H1N1. These underlying conditions include asthma, diabetes, suppressed immune systems, heart disease, kidney disease, neurocognitive and neuromuscular disorders, and pregnancy.

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9) How long can an infected person spread the flu virus to others?

- People infected with seasonal and novel H1N1 flu shed the virus and may be able to infect others from one day before getting sick to five to seven days after.
- This contagious period can be longer in some people, especially children and people with weakened immune systems and in people infected with the novel H1N1 virus.
- If you get sick, stay home and keep sick children home, until free from fever for 24 hours without using fever reducing medication.

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10) What can I do to protect myself from getting sick?

- Protect yourself by getting vaccinated with a seasonal flu shot or nasal mist. Once the pandemic H1N1 influenza vaccine is available, children 10 years and older and adults will only need one shot (or nasal spray), and children ages 6 months through 9 years will need two doses of H1N1 vaccine spaced a month apart.
- Everyday actions that can help prevent the spread of germs that cause respiratory illnesses like influenza:
 - 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 hand cleaners are also effective.
 - Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.

- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- Stay home if you get sick. Remain at home until you are free from fever for at least 24 hours without the use of fever reducing medications.
- Other important actions that you can take are:
 - Follow public health advice regarding avoiding crowds and other social distancing measures, and school closures.
 - Be prepared in case you get sick and need to stay home for a week or so; a supply of over-the-counter medicines, alcohol-based hand rubs, tissues and other related items could be useful and help avoid the need to make trips out in public while you are sick and contagious.

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11) If I have a family member at home who is sick with novel H1N1 flu, should I go to work?

- Employees who are well but who have an ill family member at home with novel H1N1 flu can go to work as usual. These employees should monitor their health every day, and take everyday precautions including washing their hands often with soap and water, especially after they cough or sneeze.
- If you become ill, notify your supervisor and stay home. Employees who have an underlying medical condition or who are pregnant should call their health care provider for advice, because they might need to receive influenza antiviral drugs to prevent illness.

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12) What is the best technique for washing my hands to avoid getting the flu?

- Washing your hands often with soap and water will help protect you from germs. Wash with soap and water for 15 to 20 seconds. When soap and water are not available, alcohol-based disposable hand wipes or gel sanitizers may be used. If using gel, rub your hands until the gel is dry. The gel doesn't need water to work; the alcohol in it kills the germs on your hands.

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13) What should I do if I get sick?

- Most cases of the seasonal flu and the novel H1N1 flu have been mild in Marion County. If you come down with a fever of 100 degrees Fahrenheit or greater, cough and/or sore throat; stay home, drink plenty of fluids, and rest. Take over-the-counter fever reducing medications such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen if needed. **People under age 19 should not take aspirin.** *Stay home until 24 hours after the fever goes away without the help of fever-reducing medications.*
- Seek medical attention as soon as possible if you get flu-like symptoms and are at high-risk of complications from the flu. Children under the age of 5 years, pregnant women, people of any age with chronic medical conditions (such as pulmonary disease, asthma, diabetes, neuromuscular disorders or heart disease, kidney disease, neurocognitive disorders, suppressed immune systems?), and people age 65 years and older are more likely to get complications from the flu.

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14) How do I know if I need to see a doctor?

- If you have a severe influenza like illness or you are at high risk for flu complications, contact your health care provider or seek medical care. Your health care provider will determine whether flu testing or treatment is needed.
- Emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:
 - In children:
 - Fast breathing or trouble breathing

- Bluish or gray skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Not waking up or not interacting
- Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough
- In adults
 - Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
 - Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
 - Sudden dizziness
 - Confusion
 - Severe or persistent vomiting
 - Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough

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15) What if I'm ill and don't have a health care provider or medical insurance?

- If you feel you need to see a doctor regarding your flu symptoms, but don't have health insurance or a regular doctor, call 1-800-SAFENET (723-3638) for referral to a nearby, low-cost clinic. If you have a severe illness such as sustained high fever or difficulty breathing, or you believe that you require immediate medical attention, call 911 or go to your nearest emergency department.

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16) How do I care for someone who is ill with H1N1 flu?

- Check with the health care provider about any special care the person may need for certain health conditions such as pregnancy, diabetes, heart disease, asthma, or emphysema-and determine if the ill person should take antiviral medication.
- Treat the flu sufferer with over-the-counter pain and fever relievers such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen, but never give aspirin to children under the age of 19.
- Do not give children younger than four years of age over-the-counter cold medications without first checking with their health care provider.
- Avoid close face-to-face with the sick person
- Try to provide good ventilation.
- Wash your hands after touching the sick person and keep surfaces clean.
- Keep the ill person at home but away from others in the house as much as possible, at least until fever is absent for 24 hours without the use of fever reducing medicines.
- Make sure the sick person drinks plenty of liquids.

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17) What are some examples fever reducing medicines?

- Medicines that contain acetaminophen or ibuprofen. Some popular national brands are Tylenol®, Motrin and Advil®
- Never give aspirin to a child under the age of 18; doing so could result in Reye's syndrome, a brain damage and liver disease caused by ingesting aspirin during severe illness like the flu or even a severe cold.

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18) Why is drinking liquids important?

- The flu virus causes the body to lose water through fever and sweating. Signs of dehydration include weakness, fainting, dry mouth, dark urine, low blood pressure, or a fast pulse when resting. To prevent dehydration, it's very important for a person with the flu to drink a lot of water or other clear fluids (such as broth, sports drinks, or electrolyte beverages for infants).

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19) What can I do to protect my baby?

- Take everyday precautions such as washing your hands with plain soap and water or using an alcohol-based hand rub before feeding your baby. Try not to cough or sneeze in the baby's face while feeding your baby, or any other time you and your baby are close. If possible, only family members who are not sick should care for infants. If you are sick and there is no one else to care for your baby, wear a facemask and cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing.

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20) Does breastfeeding protect babies from the novel H1N1 flu virus?

- Yes. Breastfeeding and breast milk protect babies' health. Babies who are breastfed do not get as sick and are sick less often from the flu, than do babies who are not breastfed.

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21) Should I stop breastfeeding my baby if I think I have come in contact with the flu?

- No. Mothers make antibodies to fight diseases they come in contact with and their milk is custom-made to fight the diseases their babies are exposed to as well. It is OK to take medicines to prevent the flu while you are breastfeeding. However, if you develop symptoms of the flu such as fever, cough, or sore throat, you should ask someone who is not sick to care for your baby. If you become sick, someone who is not sick can give your baby your expressed milk.

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22) If my baby is sick, is it okay to breastfeed?

- Yes. One of the best things you can do for your sick baby is keep breastfeeding. Give your baby many chances to breastfeed throughout the illness. Babies who are sick need more fluids than when they are well. The fluid babies get from breast milk is better than anything else, even better than water, juice, or Pedialyte® because it also helps protect your baby's immune system.

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23) What are the high-priority groups identified to receive novel H1N1 flu vaccine?

- Children and young adults from 6 months to 24 years.
- Pregnant women
- Health care workers and emergency responders
- Household contacts and people caring for infants under 6 months of age
- People aged 25-64 with underlying medical conditions such as asthma, diabetes, other conditions affecting the heart, lungs, blood, liver or kidneys, and people with weakened immune systems.

If you are at high risk for flu complications, contact your health care provider or seek medical care. Your health care provider will determine whether flu testing or treatment is needed.

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24) Are there medicines to treat novel H1N1 infection?

- Yes. Although most people get well without medication, antiviral drugs such as Oseltamivir (Tamiflu™) and Zanamivir (Relenza™). Some people are more likely to get severely ill with the flu. If you belong to a high risk group and you come down with symptoms of the flu, call your health care provider right away to discuss whether antiviral treatment is needed.

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25) What are antiviral drugs?

- Antivirals are prescription medicines that fight against the flu by preventing flu viruses from reproducing in your body. If you get sick, taking antiviral drugs within 48 hours of first developing symptoms can make your illness milder, make you feel better faster, and may also prevent serious flu complications. It's important to remember that antivirals are not a "silver bullet." It is impractical to take antivirals to prevent getting the flu because you would have to take them constantly and they are expensive. The misuse of antivirals can lead to the development of flu viruses that cannot be treated.

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26) Does Oregon have antiviral medicines?

- The State of Oregon has purchased antiviral medicine and Federal stockpiles are available if necessary. This fall, antivirals may be prioritized for individuals with severe illness or those at higher risk for flu complications.

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27) Should I get a seasonal flu shot?

- Yes. Every year in the United States, on average, five to twenty percent of the population gets the flu. More than 200,000 people are hospitalized and about 36,000 die from seasonal flu-related causes. The seasonal flu vaccine will not protect against novel H1N1 flu, but it will reduce your chances of getting the seasonal flu and help to keep you healthy.

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28) Who should get vaccinated for seasonal flu?

- Everyone ages six months and older. This year's seasonal flu vaccine will not protect against H1N1 flu.
 - People who should definitely get the seasonal flu vaccine each year are:
 - Children aged 6 months to 19 years
 - Pregnant women
 - People 50 years of age and older
 - People of any age with certain chronic medical conditions
 - People who live in nursing homes and other long-term care facilities
 - People who live with or care for those at high risk for complications from flu, including:
 - (a) Health care workers and emergency services personnel
 - (b) Household contacts of persons at high risk for complications from the flu
 - (c) Household contacts and out of home caregivers of children less than 6 months of age (these children are too young to be vaccinated)

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29) When will the vaccine be available to protect against H1N1?

- We received the first shipments of H1N1 vaccine on October 5, 2009. We expect to receive additional shipments at least every two weeks until everyone who wants to be is vaccinated.

- Children nine and younger will need two doses of the vaccine, spaced four weeks apart.
- Everyone older than nine will only need one dose.

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30) Will the novel H1N1 vaccine be safe?

- The novel H1N1 vaccine is being made using the same manufacturing and approval process as seasonal flu vaccine. In addition, it has been tested on thousands of volunteers nationally with no serious side effects reported.

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31) Who should get the novel H1N1 flu vaccine?

- Everyone.
 - Because there won't be enough for everyone when the vaccine is first released in mid-October certain groups will receive vaccine first:
 - Children aged 6 months to 24 years
 - Pregnant women
 - People of any age with certain chronic medical conditions
 - People who live with or care for those at high risk for complications from flu, including:
 - (a) Health care workers and emergency services personnel
 - (b) Household contacts of persons at high risk for complications from the flu
 - (c) Household contacts and out of home caregivers of children less than 6 months of age (these children are too young to be vaccinated)

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32) Why aren't people older than 65 years of age receiving priority for the novel H1N1 flu vaccine?

- Currently, studies show the risk for infection among persons age 65 or older is less than the risk for younger age groups. As more vaccine is produced the new H1N1 flu vaccine will be available for people older than 65 years. People 65 years and older should get a seasonal flu shot as soon as possible.

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33) Should I receive the novel H1N1 flu vaccine even if I think I have already had the novel H1N1 flu?

- All persons in a recommended vaccination target group who did not have 2009 H1N1 virus infection confirmed by special tests done at CDC or the Oregon State Public Health Lab should be vaccinated with the 2009 H1N1 vaccine. Rapid flu tests performed at hospitals or clinics, or a diagnosis based on symptoms alone, cannot specifically determine if a person has had 2009 H1N1 influenza. People who think they had 2009 H1N1 infection confirmed by special testing should ask their doctor if they should be vaccinated. People who were not tested, but who became ill after being exposed to a person with confirmed 2009 H1N1 influenza should not assume that they also had 2009 H1N1 since many different viruses can cause an influenza-like illness. Vaccination of a person with some existing immunity to the 2009 H1N1 virus will not be harmful and persons who are uncertain about how they were diagnosed should get the 2009 H1N1 vaccine.

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34) Will schools close because of novel H1N1 flu?

- School closures will be handled on a local level. Parents are encouraged to learn their schools' policies on illnesses and being absent. Keep your sick children home until they are fever-free for at least 24

hours without the use of fever reducing medicine. It is unlikely that schools will close because of H1N1, but just in case, make a plan for taking care of your children if schools are not open for long periods. If your child is healthy, it is best if he or she attends school.

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35) What about "swine flu parties"?

- "Swine flu parties" are gatherings during which people have close contact with a person who has novel H1N1 flu in order to become infected with the virus. The intent of these parties is for a person to become infected with what for many people has been a mild disease, in the hope of having natural immunity against novel H1N1 flu virus that might circulate later and cause more severe disease.
- The CDC does not recommend "swine flu parties" as a way to protect against novel H1N1 flu in the future. While the disease seen in the current novel H1N1 flu outbreak has been mild for many people, it has been severe and even fatal for others. There is no way to predict with certainty what the outcome will be for an individual or, equally important, for others to whom the intentionally infected person may come into contact with.
- People with novel H1N1 flu should avoid contact with others as much as possible. If you are sick with flu-like illness, stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone except to get medical care. Stay away from others as much as possible to keep from making others sick.

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36) How long can influenza virus remain alive on objects (such as books and doorknobs)?

- Studies have shown that influenza virus can survive on surfaces in our homes, schools and workplaces such as books, counters, keyboards, telephones, etc.
- These germs can infect a person for up to eight hours after being deposited on the surface.

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37) What kills influenza virus?

- Washing with soap and water
- Heat
- Common household cleaners labeled 'kills flu'
 - Follow instructions for use.

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38) What if soap and water are not available and alcohol-based products are not allowed in my facility?

- Other hand sanitizers that do not contain alcohol may be useful however, there is less evidence on their effectiveness compared to that on hand washing and alcohol-based sanitizers. Though the scientific evidence is not as extensive as that on hand washing and alcohol-based sanitizers, other hand sanitizers that do not contain alcohol may be useful for killing flu germs on hands.

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39) How should waste disposal be handled to prevent the spread of influenza virus?

- To prevent the spread of influenza virus, it is recommended that tissues and other disposable items used by an infected person be thrown in the trash. Additionally, persons should wash their hands with soap and water after touching used tissues and similar waste.

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40) What household cleaning should be done to prevent the spread of influenza virus?

- To prevent the spread of influenza virus it is important to keep surfaces (especially bedside tables, surfaces in the bathroom, kitchen counters, and toys for children) clean by wiping them down with a household disinfectant according to directions on the product label.
- A bleach solution can also be made and used to disinfect surfaces:
 - **Chlorine Bleach Disinfectant Mixture:**
 - Mix ¼ cup store brand chlorine bleach AND 1 gallon of cool water.
 - Allow 10 minutes of contact on surface before rinsing off thoroughly with water.
 - Make fresh daily.

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41) How should linens, eating utensils, and dishes of persons infected with influenza virus be handled?

- Linens, eating utensils, and dishes belonging to those who are sick do not need to be cleaned separately, but most importantly these items should not be shared without washing thoroughly first.
- Linens (such as bed sheets and towels) should be washed by using household laundry soap and tumbled dry on a hot setting. Individuals should avoid “hugging” laundry prior to washing it to prevent contaminating themselves. Individuals should wash their hands with soap and water or alcohol-based hand rub immediately after handling dirty laundry.
- Eating utensils should be washed either in a dishwasher or by hand with water and soap.

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42) Can I get infected with novel H1N1 virus from eating or preparing pork?

- No. Novel H1N1 viruses are not spread by food. You cannot get infected with novel H1N1 virus from eating pork or pork products. Eating properly handled and cooked pork products is safe.

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43) Is there a risk of getting the flu from drinking water?

- No. Tap water that has been treated by conventional disinfection processes does not likely pose a risk for transmission of influenza viruses. Current drinking water treatment regulations provide a high degree of protection from viruses.
- Don't share drinking glasses and eating utensils.

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44) Can novel H1N1 flu virus be spread through water in swimming pools, spas, water parks, interactive fountains, and other treated recreational water venues?

- No. Influenza viruses infect the human upper respiratory tract. There has never been a documented case of influenza virus infection associated with water exposure.

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45) How should I prepare for a major flu outbreak in my community?

- There are many things you can do right now to prepare for a major novel H1N1 outbreak in your community:
- Make a kit that includes:
 - Enough food and water per person to last a week or more
 - A week's supply of the medicines you take regularly

- Items to relieve flu symptoms such as cold packs, blankets, humidifiers, and fever and pain reducers like acetaminophen or ibuprofen.
- Personal items: soap, shampoo, toothpaste, toilet paper, cleansing supplies
- Activities for you and your children including books, crafts, and games
- Cash. Banks may not always be open
- Pet supplies: food, water and litter
- Cell phone or landline phone with a cord
- Large trash bags - garbage services may be disrupted
- Make a plan:
 - Ask your employer or union about policies concerning sick leave, absences, time off, and telecommuting. Know your schools' policies on illnesses and being absent. Remember that you and your children should not return to school or work until you are fever-free for 24 hours without the use of fever reducing medicines.
 - Make a work plan for ensuring essential duties can be completed if large numbers of employees are absent over many months. Make household and emergency plans such as deciding who will care for children if schools close and how you will care for family members with disabilities if social services are limited. Be prepared to get by for at least a week on what you have at home - stores may close or have limited supplies.
- Stay informed:
 - Watch the MCHD website www.co.marion.or.us/hlt
 - Watch local TV stations for updates
 - Listen to local radio stations for updates

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46) How many people have the flu right now?

- It is not possible to say exactly how many people have or have had the novel H1N1 flu at any given time, because not everyone who becomes ill with the flu is tested. In the United States, only hospitalizations and deaths from novel H1N1 influenza are currently being reported. An updated case count of hospitalizations in the United States due to confirmed novel H1N1 flu is available on the CDC website.

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47) What if I get exposed to the flu before I've been vaccinated?

- If you are at high risk of complications from flu contact your doctor to talk about whether you need medicine.

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48) Can I receive the seasonal and H1N1 flu vaccines at the same time?

- The flu shot can be administered at the same visit as any other vaccine, including pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine. The H1N1 FluMist™ vaccine (nasal spray) can be administered at the same visit as any other live or inactivated vaccine EXCEPT seasonal FluMist™ vaccine.

Flu Vaccine Combinations

	H1N1 FluMist™	H1N1 Flu Shot
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Seasonal FluMist™	Wait 28 days between each FluMist™	Same Day
Seasonal Flu Shot	Same Day	Same Day

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49) How long after I receive the H1N1 vaccine will it take for me to be protected?

- Based on trials using the H1N1 vaccine in volunteers, it appears that protection against the H1N1 virus develops in about 8-10 days after vaccination.

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50) Where can I find a location to receive a seasonal flu shot?

- The American Lung Association has a website to assist you in this: <http://www.flucliniclocator.org/>

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51) Where can I find a location to receive a novel H1N1 flu shot?

- Call your health care provider to find out about H1N1 vaccine availability. If you do not have a health care provider call the Marion County Health Department at (503) 584-4780 to set up an appointment.

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52) What is the difference between a cold and the flu?

- The flu and the common cold are both respiratory illnesses but they are caused by different viruses. Because these two types of illnesses have similar flu-like symptoms, it can be difficult to tell the difference between them based on symptoms alone.
- In general, the flu is worse than the common cold, and symptoms such as fever, body aches, extreme tiredness, and dry cough are more common and intense.
- Colds are usually milder than the flu. People with colds are more likely to have a runny or stuffy nose. Colds generally do not result in serious health problems, such as pneumonia, bacterial infections, or hospitalizations.

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53) Have a question you don't see here?

- Email the Marion County Health Department at health@co.marion.or.us, or call (503) 584-4870.

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54) What is the difference between the flu shot and FluMist™?

- Both the flu shot and nasal spray (FluMist™) are vaccines to prevent the flu. The flu shot can be given to anyone 6 months of age and older who needs or wants to be protected from the flu, including people who are at high risk from complications from the flu. The nasal spray flu vaccine is needle-free alternative that can be given to healthy non-pregnant people ages 2-49 years.

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55) I went to the doctor because I think I have novel H1N1 and they didn't test me, why not?

- When this new flu virus was first identified testing was being done more frequently to determine when it arrived in the community and to try to get an idea of who was affected by it. Now that the virus is circulating most places, testing is being focused on those who are severely ill (in the hospital) or who may be at high risk for complications to help determine if treatment needs to be started. Since the H1N1 is the main virus circulating right now, most people do not need to be tested for it specifically. If you have the flu now, it is most likely H1N1.

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56) Will (or can) I get the flu from a flu vaccine?

- The flu vaccine is made from killed flu virus while the nasal spray is made from weakened flu virus that stays in the nose and stimulates immunity. Neither vaccine can give you the flu.

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