



# Preparing for pandemic H1N1 influenza



**A personal and family guide**

**[www.flu.oregon.gov](http://www.flu.oregon.gov)**

# From the state public health director



Most of us are familiar with seasonal influenza or “the flu” that comes each year, but there is currently a worldwide epidemic, caused by a new strain of flu known as “pandemic H1N1 flu”. This new strain has the potential to make millions sick in our country and around the world.

As of the time when I am writing this note, the illness caused by this new strain appears to be similar to seasonal flu, which kills as many as 36,000 in the U.S. each year. However, people have no existing immunity to this new strain, so more people are expected to become ill. Also it is possible that the virus will change in the coming months and become more dangerous. In either case, it is likely that we will have a serious outbreak caused by this new strain of flu this fall in Oregon.

This guide is designed to help you, your family and your community prepare for the possibility of a serious flu pandemic. I hope you will take the time to read through this information, share it with others and take action. You can make a difference, and help keep Oregonians safe and healthy. Additional information about flu and about preparing for the pandemic is available on our website at [www.flu.oregon.gov](http://www.flu.oregon.gov).

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mel A. Kohn, MD MPH".

Dr. Mel Kohn

# Pandemic H1N1 influenza — What it is



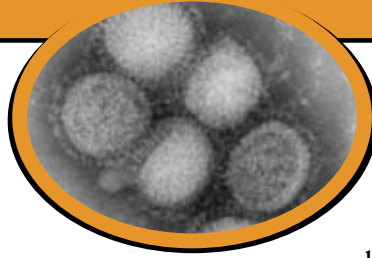
**An influenza pandemic is a worldwide outbreak of**

## **a new flu virus**

An influenza—or flu—pandemic is an outbreak of a new type of flu virus that spreads rapidly from one country to another. The new virus affects only birds or animals at first, but gradually changes to affect people as well. A pandemic begins when the new flu virus is easily passed from person to person.

## **A flu pandemic is more serious than the seasonal flu**

Not as many people get sick from seasonal flu because people have developed some immunity to the virus and because so many protect themselves by getting annual flu shots. However, the pandemic H1N1 is caused by a new type of flu virus. People have no immunity to it and, although a vaccine is being developed, it is not yet available to prevent it. It takes months to develop and produce a vaccine that works against a new pandemic flu



virus, and testing is currently underway to determine whether the new vaccine is safe and effective against pandemic H1N1. Because of this—and because people have no immunity—the new flu virus spreads rapidly. Hundreds of thousands in our country could get sick, and many could die.



## **Flu pandemics happen**

Flu viruses are everywhere and they change constantly. Currently, health officials are paying careful attention to the spread of H1N1 in the Southern Hemisphere, because the virus could change and cause more severe illness. Other large pandemics occurred in 1918, 1957, 1968 and 1976. Far more people travel today than in the past, which makes it easier for diseases to spread quickly around the world.

## **Pandemic**

A disease outbreak that spreads rapidly around the world.

## **Influenza**

An infection of the lungs caused by a virus that can be passed from person to person. The symptoms include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue.

## **Seasonal Influenza**

A common form of influenza that spreads each winter. Flu shots protect many people from becoming infected.

## **Pandemic H1N1 Influenza**

A strain of flu that has combined elements of swine, avian and human flu, and passes easily from person to person.

# What to expect this fall and winter

## Everyone should be prepared

If large numbers of people become ill with the flu:

- It may be difficult to get medical care.
- Large numbers of sick people may overwhelm hospitals and clinics.
- Doctors and nurses will get sick, too, so hospitals and clinics may be short-staffed.

## Services may be limited

Many people will be unable to work, affecting how long businesses, banks, government offices and other services are open.

## Keep your distance

If the severity of the illness increases, you may be asked to stay away from others. Staying home will help stop the spread of the virus. Events may be canceled, and theaters and schools closed. Currently these actions are not anticipated, based on what we know about the illness caused by this new strain.



## Supplies may be limited

- Flu shots to protect against H1N1 may not be immediately available. People at highest risk for complications from pandemic H1N1 will be the first to receive vaccination.
- Medicines for flu symptoms may be in short supply.

## Travel may be difficult

Routes and schedules for buses, trains or planes may change or be restricted. Gasoline may also be in short supply.

## This flu pandemic could last a long time

The 1918 flu pandemic lasted 18 months. In some cases, pandemics weaken for a while and then recur.

## Health officials will keep you informed

They will work with the media to provide timely information and advice. Visit [www.flu.oregon.gov](http://www.flu.oregon.gov) for updated information.

# What to do — In your community



## Know your neighbors

Talk with family, friends and neighbors

to make sure everyone is prepared. Be ready to help neighbors who are elderly or have special needs if services they depend on are not available.



taking care of your children if schools are not open for long periods.

If your children become ill, keep them home from school until they have been free from fever (a measurable temperature of 100 degrees F or higher) for at least 24 hours.

## Know school policies

Know policies about illnesses and being absent. School closures are unlikely, but just in case, make a plan for

## What to do — At work

### You may not be able to go to work

Staying home from work when you are sick is the most important thing you can do to protect others. Stay home until you have been free from fever (a measurable temperature of 100 degrees F or higher) for at least 24 hours.

### Know policies

Ask your employer or union about sick leave and policies about absences, time off and telecommuting.



### Encourage planning

Every business, organization and agency should have a plan for making sure essential work can get done if large numbers of employees are absent over many months. You may be asked to perform duties that are not typically part of your job.

### Explore other ways to get your work done

When people are ill, find ways to reduce personal contact, such as increased use of e-mails or phone conferences.

## What to do — Protect your health

### Protect yourself by getting vaccinated

Be sure to get an annual flu shot or nasal-spray vaccine as soon as it is available. This will protect you from the most common varieties of seasonal flu expected to be circulating this fall and winter.

Once a new vaccine is available, two additional flu shots may be necessary to protect you from the pandemic H1N1 virus. To offer the best protection, your second shot for H1N1 will likely need to be given 21-28 days after your first vaccination.

### Prevent the spread of germs

The flu virus is spread from person to person when an ill person coughs, sneezes or touches things that others use. Do these simple, effective things to help protect yourself and others:

- Cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze. It is best not to use your bare hand. Cough into your sleeve or cover your mouth and nose with a tissue. Properly dispose of the tissue in a garbage can.
- Wash your hands. The best way to protect yourself from viruses is to wash your hands often. Soap and water are best, but when they are not available, use alcohol-based hand gel or disposable wipes.



- Don't touch your eyes, nose or mouth. The flu virus is often spread when a person touches something that has the virus on it and then touches his or her eyes, nose or mouth.

- Stay home when you're sick or have flu symptoms. Drink extra water, get plenty of rest and check with a health care provider as needed.

### Home care

**Learn basic care-giving.** Know how to care for someone with a fever, body aches and lung congestion. Health authorities will provide specific instructions for caring for those who are sick as well as information about when to call a health care provider.

### Learn how to recognize and treat dehydration.

Watch for weakness, fainting, dry mouth, dark concentrated urine, low blood pressure or a fast pulse when lying or sitting down. These are signs of dehydration. The flu virus causes the body to lose water through fever and sweating. To prevent dehydration, it is very important for a person with the flu to drink a lot of water—up to 12 glasses a day.

# What to do — At home

## Keep these items in your home

- Enough food and water per person for a week or more—Choose foods that will keep for a long time and do not require refrigeration or cooking. Include a non-electric can opener.
- Medications—Keep at least a week's supply of the medicines you take regularly.
- Items to relieve flu symptoms—Stock medicines for fever, such as ibuprofen and acetaminophen. Never give aspirin or products that contain aspirin to children or teens who have the flu. This can cause Reye's syndrome, a potentially deadly disorder that can cause swelling of the brain.
- Cold packs, blankets and humidifiers will also be useful. Have extra water and fruit juices on hand in case someone is sick—the flu virus causes dehydration, and drinking extra fluids helps.
- Items for personal comfort—Store at least a week's supply of soap, shampoo, toothpaste, toilet paper and cleaning products.



- Activities for yourself and your children—Include books, crafts, board games, art supplies and other things to do.

- Cash—Banks may not always be open.

- Pet supplies—Remember food, water and litter.
- Cell phone or regular phone with a cord.
- Large trash bags—Garbage service may be disrupted or postponed for many days.

## Make household and family emergency plans

- Decide who will take care of children if schools are closed.
- Plan to limit the number of trips you take to shop or to run errands. Also, remember public transportation routes and times may be limited.
- Think about how you would care for people in your family who have disabilities if support services are not available.
- Be prepared to get by for at least a week on what you have at home. Stores may not be open or may have limited supplies.

## Learn more

Local public health agencies in Oregon  
[www.oregon.gov/DHS/ph/lhd/lhd.shtml](http://www.oregon.gov/DHS/ph/lhd/lhd.shtml)



Federal pandemic H1N1 flu information  
[www.flu.gov](http://www.flu.gov)

World Health Organization (WHO)  
[www.who.int](http://www.who.int)

Oregon Public Health Division  
[www.flu.oregon.gov](http://www.flu.oregon.gov)

Oregon Public Health Hotline  
1-800-978-3040



DHS 9743 (Rev. 08/13/09)

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