



Patterson and Tedford Pediatrics

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What to do if you get flu like symptoms

Background

The novel H1N1 flu virus (aka “swine flu”) is causing illness in infected individuals around the world, around the country, around our state and in our community. Experts at the CDC expect that this situation will continue for some time. Many people are expected to become ill. Recognizing the signs and symptoms of influenza and knowing what to do will help your family and our community.

Recognize the symptoms

The symptoms of the new H1N1 flu virus are similar to the symptoms of seasonal flu. They include fever, chills, dry cough, sore throat, runny nose, muscle aches and often extreme fatigue.

Avoid Contact with others

Generally, influenza caused illness lasts a week or longer. Expect to keep your infected child home and away from others to the extent it is possible. Avoid travel, work and school for at least 24 hours after the fever is gone except to get medical care. If you take your child out it is a good idea to have them wear a facemask, if available and tolerable. Teach your children to cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or with the inner aspect of the elbow. Be considerate of others and avoid contact with friends, family members and especially individuals who are medically fragile, pregnant or elderly. With seasonal flu, your school aged child may be contagious from the day before they develop symptoms to up to seven days after they develop symptoms. Your infant, toddler or preschooler may be contagious even longer. We are uncertain about the duration of H1N1 contagion.

Treatment is available for individuals who are seriously ill.

Most people who get the flu will recover from the flu without requiring medical attention. Children and adults who have a severe illness or who are at high risk for flu complications should contact their health care provider or seek medical attention. Generally, rapid flu testing is accomplished in the office and treatment options can be explored. Be aware that if the flu becomes widespread, less testing will be needed, so it is possible we and other health care providers may decide a flu test is not necessary. Severely ill children and adults can be treated with antiviral medications like Tamiflu®. These medications can have side effects, are expensive and most importantly subject to

being overused to the point that the virus will become resistant. Antivirals are currently effective against the H1N1 virus but as the epidemic unfolds there is concern that they may be in short supply. If that occurs these medications will be reserved for hospitalized patients or those that are at high risk for complications. They work best when given within the first 48 hours of the start of the illness. Aspirin or aspirin containing products (like Pepto Bismo®) should not be administered to any confirmed or suspected case of the flu in children 18 years and younger due to the risk of Reye’s syndrome. For relief of fever, headache and body aches associated with the flu acetaminophen or ibuprofen can be used.

Emergency warning signs for children

1. Fast (more than 50 breaths per minute) or labored breathing
2. Bluish or grey skin color (cyanosis)
3. Inadequate hydration (dry mouth or inadequate urine output)
4. Severe or persistent vomiting
5. Confusion or inadequate responsiveness, increasing irritability (can’t be comforted)
6. Flu like symptoms improve but then return with fever, increased cough or rapid breathing.

Prevention is best

Vaccination is safe, effective and highly recommended by infectious disease experts. It is much less costly than getting the illness and is widely available. In “average” years about 30% of all children and 5-10% of adults contract the flu. This year the percentages are expected to be significantly higher because of the added threat of the H1N1 virus. Wash your hands regularly, avoid touching your face and keep your distance (>6 feet) from people suspected of having the flu.

Influenza vaccines are available now and cost \$35. A nasal spray vaccine is approved for individuals between 2 and 49.

We vaccinate parents and grandparents too.
