

## **Information You Can Use: Seasonal Flu and 2009 H1N1 Flu**

As you know flu season is upon us. On average, more than 200,000 people in the U.S. are hospitalized and about 36,000 people die each year from seasonal flu-related illness. This year we are faced with not just seasonal flu, but with the 2009 H1N1 flu virus. Optima Health and our parent company, Sentara Healthcare, are making plans to address this very serious threat.

Influenza (seasonal flu) is a contagious respiratory illness caused by flu viruses which can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death. According to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) the best way to prevent seasonal flu is to get a seasonal flu shot every year.

2009 H1N1 (swine flu) is a new flu virus causing respiratory illness in people. It was first detected in people in the United States in April 2009. This virus is spreading from person-to-person similar to the way seasonal flu spreads. The seasonal flu shot does not protect against H1N1 flu.

**2009 H1N1 flu is different from seasonal flu. Hardest hit from 2009 H1N1 flu are people less than 25 years old, pregnant women, and people with chronic health conditions. Seasonal flu typically causes serious complications in people 65 years and over, young children, and people with chronic health conditions.**

Details about 2009 H1N1 flu continue to become available. As we receive new information, we will pass it along to you. Here is what we can tell you now:

### **Seasonal and 2009 H1N1 Flu Vaccination:**

1. All Optima Health members with vaccine coverage will be covered for both the seasonal flu vaccine and the 2009 H1N1 vaccine.
2. Get your seasonal flu vaccine now. Members may receive this vaccine from their doctor's office or local pharmacy. Physician office Copayments may apply, if you receive this vaccine from your doctor. Members can call Optima Health Member Services, at the number on the back of their ID card, if they need assistance finding a location to receive the shot. Members may also check with their employer to see if they have made arrangements to provide the seasonal flu vaccine at work.
3. The Health Department expects to distribute the 2009 H1N1 flu vaccine in October through many of the same avenues that seasonal flu vaccine is provided. To date, more than 2,000 Virginia physicians, clinics, pharmacies, retail stores, and other vaccine providers have pre-registered for the state's 2009 H1N1 flu vaccination program, signaling their initial interest in serving as a vaccination site.
4. The CDC recommends the following high-risk groups receive the 2009 H1N1 flu vaccine:
  - Pregnant women;
  - Household contacts and caregivers for children younger than 6 months of age;
  - Healthcare and emergency medical services personnel;
  - All people from 6 months through 24 years of age; and

- Persons aged 25 through 64 who have health conditions associated with a higher risk of medical complications from influenza.

## **Take Action to Stay Healthy**

Flu is a respiratory illness that is highly contagious and spread person to person through sneezing and coughing as well as from touching contaminated surfaces. As always, the following precautions can minimize the risk of flu exposure:

- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer, especially after coughing or sneezing.
- Sneeze into your sleeve or cover your nose and mouth with a tissue. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it, and then immediately wash your hands.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth to keep germs off your hands.
- Stay home and limit contact with others, if you get sick.
- If you work, stay in touch with Occupational Health or your doctor and follow guidelines for returning to work.

## **What you can do if you or a family member gets sick:**

1. Understand flu symptoms: fever and respiratory illness such as cough, runny or stuffy nose; sore throat, chills, fatigue, body aches, headache, vomiting and diarrhea. Most healthy people can treat flu by getting plenty of rest, drinking ample clear liquids, and managing fever with medicines like Tylenol or Motrin.
2. If you are at high risk of flu complications, seek care at the first signs of flu symptoms. Medicines work best when given within 48 hours of symptoms.
3. Groups at high risk of flu complications are: Children younger than 5, pregnant women, people 65 and older, and people with blood disorders (including sickle cell disease), chronic lung disease such as asthma or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, diabetes; heart disease except hypertension; liver, kidney, neurological and neuromuscular disorders; weakened immune systems; or people younger than 19 who are receiving long-term aspirin therapy because of increased risk for Reye's syndrome.
4. Make a personal plan with your doctor now. This should include how your doctor would like you to manage the flu. If you are at risk for complications your doctor may recommend an antiviral as part of your treatment plan. This is only recommended for season flu, not H1N1.
5. Know where to go for care. Your doctors' offices—including obstetricians and pediatricians—and area urgent care centers are a first step to medical care.
6. Know warning signs for urgent medical care. Flu symptoms usually resolve in 5 days. If symptoms last longer, contact your doctor. If you or your child has any of the following potentially life-threatening symptoms, seek medical care immediately: difficulty breathing or shortness of breath, severe or persistent vomiting, pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen, sudden dizziness, confusion, or flu symptoms that improve and return with fever or cough. Infants need urgent medical care if they have bluish or gray skin, are not drinking,

are not interacting, or are so irritable, they don't want to be held.

**Stay Informed:**

1. The CDC offers extensive information on the seasonal flu and H1N1. Please visit their Web site, [www.cdc.gov/flu](http://www.cdc.gov/flu) for more information.
2. Visit the Virginia Department of Health's Web site, <http://www.vdh.state.va.us/> or call 877-ASK-VDH3 (877-275-8343) during business hours for local H1N1 information.
3. Sentara has developed an electronic newsletter called FluNews to provide information on flu in Hampton Roads. To sign up to receive FluNews, go to [www.sentara.com/flu](http://www.sentara.com/flu).
4. Provider updates and general flu information is available at <http://www.optimahealth.com/OptimaHealth/Providers/Unsecured>