



## Women's Health Clinical Effectiveness Council H1N1 Patient Education Handout

The Women's Health Clinical Effectiveness Council is a partnership between Sentara and Eastern Virginia Medical School Maternal Fetal Medicine experts to promote best practices across Sentara in women's and infant's health matters. With a focus on patient safety, the following is based on information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for the 2009-2010 flu season.

### What is 2009 H1N1 (swine flu)?

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H1N1 flu (swine flu) is a contagious respiratory disease that spreads from person to person through droplets caused by coughs and sneezes or by touching surfaces with germs. The 2009 H1N1 virus is different from seasonal flu and may have dangerous consequences for pregnant women and young people such as serious respiratory illness and death.

**Pregnant women are at higher risk of complications for flu and especially 2009 H1N1 including pneumonia, dehydration and preterm labor.**

If you get sick, you may be contagious one day before your symptoms appear and for approximately seven days after you become ill.

### Can I avoid getting the H1N1 Flu?

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Protect yourself and your family against the flu. These are the best ways to stay healthy:

- Get your flu shots. Seasonal flu shots are proven safe for pregnant women and fetuses. The 2009 H1N1 shot is also recommended for pregnant women.
- 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 or alcohol based hand cleaner, especially after you cough or sneeze. Help small children with hand washing.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth. Germs spread that way.
- If you are pregnant, avoid caring for anyone who has or may have flu if at all possible.
- If you get sick, stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.
- Clean shared objects more often like phone receivers, keyboards, steering wheels, and computers.
- Don't share personal items such as forks, spoons, toothbrushes, towels, pacifiers and toys that a baby may put in his mouth.
- Thoroughly wash with soap and warm water anything that has been in a baby's mouth.

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- Put a pacifier, including the handle, only in one baby's mouth.

## What are the symptoms of H1N1 Flu?

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Symptoms of 2009 H1N1 flu include: fever and respiratory illness such as cough, sore throat, and running or stuffy nose, body aches, chills, and fatigue, and sometimes diarrhea and vomiting.

## What if I have these symptoms?

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Contact your doctor right away. It's recommended for pregnant women with flu symptoms to seek care urgently and begin taking flu prescriptions within 48 hours of symptoms. Seeking care fast improves outcomes. High fever may be especially dangerous to the unborn baby. If you have a high fever, Acetaminophen is the best way to treat it.

## Is there treatment for H1N1 Flu?

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Yes. If you have flu like symptoms, contact your doctor right away. Pregnant women are at higher risk of complications from flu and 2009 H1N1. Seek medical care urgently. Pregnant women should have flu medicine, called antivirals within 48 hours of symptoms. You must have a prescription to get this drug.

It is also recommended that pregnant women who have close contact with someone who has the flu also take an antiviral drug as a precaution.

## Warning signs for urgent medical care?

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If you or your child gets sick with the flu and notice any of the following potentially life threatening sign, seek urgent medical care.

### Warning signs for urgent medical care include:

- 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.

## What are the visiting policies in Women's & Infant's Areas during this flu season?

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To protect hospital patients from the spread of 2009 H1N1 and seasonal flu, effective October 15, 2009 the following visiting policy will be followed at Sentara and most area hospitals:

- No one under the age of 18 will be permitted in most Hampton Roads area hospitals unless they are patients. This visiting policy change includes siblings of newborns.
- Adult visitors who have flu symptoms will not be permitted in area hospitals. Symptoms of flu include: fever and respiratory illness such as cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, muscle aches, chills, and sometimes vomiting and diarrhea.
- This visiting policy change will remain in effect during the flu season and while prevalence of flu in the region is extraordinarily high.

## **Why has there been a change in the visiting policy?**

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The change is intended to protect all hospital patients from the spread of 2009 H1N1 and seasonal flu, including higher risk patients such as pregnant women and children. People with flu can infect others, even before showing signs of the illness. Our goal is to minimize spread of the flu illness. This region wide policy will help us protect all area hospital patients.

## **Can I breastfeed my baby if I have the flu?**

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If you are breastfeeding and have signs of H1N1 flu, talk to your doctor. If your doctor agrees, you can continue breastfeeding while you are sick, even if you are taking an antifu drug.

Mother's milk helps babies to fight disease and may help your baby avoid the flu.

To reduce the risk to your baby, wash your hands often, try not to cough or sneeze on the baby. You may also want to wear a face mask.

According to scientists, babies are not likely to get the flu from breast milk.

If you feel too sick to breastfeed, you may pump your milk if you feel up to it.

## **Is there a vaccine for the H1N1 Flu?**

A vaccine for H1N1 flu is currently being developed. It is expected to be ready for patients in October 2009. When the H1N1 vaccine is ready it is recommended that the following people:

- Pregnant women
- People who live with or care for children younger than 6 months old
- Persons between the ages of 6 months through 24 years of age
- Health care and emergency workers
- People aged 25 through 64 who have chronic health problems or weak immune systems (examples of chronic health problems are asthma, diabetes, lupus and obesity)

Pregnant women are at high risk of becoming very ill from the flu, and a few have even died. For this reason, pregnant women will be among the first groups to be offered vaccine. Check with your doctor and watch for news for word of the vaccine becoming available.