

On April 29, 2009, in response to an intensifying outbreak in the United States and internationally caused by a new influenza virus of swine origin, the World Health Organization (WHO) raised the worldwide pandemic alert level to Phase 5. Phase 5 is the second highest pandemic alert level and is characterized by human-to-human spread of the virus into at least two countries in one WHO region. This raised alert level is a strong signal that a pandemic is imminent and that the time to finalize the organization, communication, and implementation of the planned mitigation measures is short. (Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) On the same day, WHO announced that it will stop using the term “swine flu” to avoid confusion over the danger posed by pigs and refer to the virus by its scientific name H1N1. (Source: Associated Press)

H1N1 is a respiratory disease of pigs caused by type A influenza that regularly causes outbreaks of influenza among pigs but does not normally infect humans. Since human infections with H1N1 viruses have been documented, it is important for all employees to know the symptoms of and take precaution against this and any other respiratory illnesses. Symptoms of H1N1 are similar to those of regular human flu and include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Anyone experiencing flu-like symptoms should consult his or her physician.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have determined that the H1N1 virus is contagious and is currently spreading by human-to-human contact. (The virus is not spreading through properly cooked pork products) Currently, there is no vaccine available to protect against H1N1, but there are prescription anti-viral drugs to which H1N1 is susceptible. At this time the Federal Government and manufacturers have begun the process of developing a vaccine. In the meantime, there are steps you can take to protect yourself and help prevent the spread of germs that cause any respiratory illnesses including influenza.

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze to prevent droplets from spreading to others. Discard the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- Wash your hands frequently and for at least 20 seconds with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Use an alcohol-based hand cleaner if soap and water are not available.
- Stay away from crowded places and large gatherings as much as possible and avoid close contact with sick people.

- If you get sick, CDC recommends that you stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them. Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth as this increases the spread of germs.
- Eat nutritious food, drink plenty of fluids, get ample sleep, try to keep your stress level at a minimum and engage in physical activities.
- If you believe you may have H1N1 and choose to visit an emergency room, contact the hospital emergency room staff **prior to going** and tell them your symptoms. The hospital may have special precautions for you to avoid exposing others who may be in the ER lobby.
- There is very little known about the benefits of wearing facemasks to protect yourself against the H1N1 virus, but you might consider wearing a facemask if you are sick with the flu or live with someone who has the flu and you need to be in a crowded place. Facemasks should be used only once, then thrown away. Facemasks worn 20 minutes should be discarded and replaced by a clean one.

If you become ill and any of the following are true, contact your health care provider immediately.

- Recently traveled to Mexico.
- Traveled to a country that has had a confirmed H1N1 case.
- Were in contact with persons who had febrile respiratory illness.

CDC investigations are ongoing to determine the source of the infection and whether additional people have been infected with similar H1N1 viruses. In addition to individual city, county and state public health officials, the CDC is working with health officials in other countries as well as the World Health Organization to reduce transmission and illness severity of H1N1.

For more information on H1N1, visit <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/swine/>.