

Preparing for H1N1

By Dr. Caleb Ng, BSc, ND

With school in full swing and colder weather just around the corner, everyone is paying close attention to news on the H1N1 influenza virus (also referred to as swine flu or swine influenza).

Symptoms

People affected by H1N1 will show usual flu symptoms such as runny nose, fever, headache, cough, sore throat, muscle aches, chills, decreased appetite and fatigue. They will also show two symptoms unusual for the seasonal flu: vomiting and diarrhea, both typical of H1N1. This may be different in infants who may present with only fever and fatigue.

Seeing a Doctor

If you suspect you have H1N1, you may want to see a health care provider. Anyone pregnant, under the age of five, over the age of 65 or with pre-existing medical conditions (chronic lung conditions, immunosuppressive conditions, cardiac disease, diabetes, or obesity) should see a doctor. Call HealthLink BC at 8-1-1 if you have symptoms or concerns, and you can speak to a nurse 24 hours a day. If you decide to see your doctor, call ahead and inform the office of your symptoms so appropriate precautions can be taken.

Vaccinations


H1N1 vaccines should be available later this year. The H1N1 vaccine is estimated to reduce chances of infection by 70-90% as long as the virus does not mutate. Some individuals may experience flu-like symptoms from the vaccination itself. Vaccinations will be available through medical doctors, immunization clinics and possibly pharmacies. Contact your doctor for further information regarding the H1N1 vaccine.

Prevention

Washing your hands regularly or cleaning them with a hand-sanitizing lotion, especially before eating, is still the single best way to prevent transmission of this flu. Take time to sit down with your family and ensure everyone is aware of what they can do to stay healthy this season:

- Cough or sneeze into a disposable tissue or even your sleeve is better than into your hands.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.
- Avoid close contact with anyone who appears like they may have a cold or flu.
- Keep children and adults who are sick at home—do not send children to school or daycare.

- Minimize stress levels and make sure you are well rested.
- Drink plenty of water.
- Exercise regularly unless you come down with the flu. If you become sick, listen to your body and give it the rest it needs.
- Minimize sugar intake.

Increasing antioxidant consumption with Vitamin C, green tea, or elderberry may prove beneficial. In one study, extracts of green tea were found to be more effective at inhibiting H5N1 Influenza A (Avian flu) than an anti-viral medication. Also consider testing your vitamin D levels. Recent literature shows that individuals with vitamin D deficiency are more likely to develop more severe symptoms from seasonal influenza. Animal models show that vitamin D deficiency causes increased susceptibility to swine flu infection. Lastly, there is also evidence that vitamin D plays a role in the way the immune system protects the respiratory tract from viral infections. 

Dr. Caleb Ng is a licensed naturopathic physician in BC. Currently, he serves on the board of the BC Naturopathic Association. For more information or for appointments, he can be reached at the Mountainview Wellness Centre in South Surrey at (604)538-8837.

