



PREVENT. PROMOTE. PROTECT.

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Health Commissioner Column

DO YOUR PART TO PREPARE FOR H1N1 FLU

HAMILTON COUNTY, OHIO – As H1N1 flu continues to circulate both locally and nationally, Hamilton County Public Health is working to prepare for vaccine distribution as well as possible widespread illness this fall. Since 2001, public health agencies have been working hard to ensure we are prepared to handle emergency situations that might arise from natural disasters, terrorist attacks or disease pandemics. While governments and public health agencies are hard at work, there are things everyone can – and should – do to stay healthy.

H1N1 virus seems to spread the same way seasonal flu spreads – mainly from person to person through coughing or sneezing by people with flu. Sometimes people may become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose. That's why practicing proper hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette is critical:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. If soap and water are not near by, use an alcohol-based hand cleaner.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. If a tissue is not available, use the inside of your elbow to cover your cough or sneeze, not your hands.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people. Try to stay six feet away from people who are coughing or sneezing.
- If you are sick, you should stay home until you are fever-free, without the use of fever-reducing medicine, for at least 24 hours.

As we anticipate H1N1 and regular flu season, there are some additional ways to protect yourself and help stop the spread of disease in our community.

Get informed

This is a rapidly changing situation. I encourage you to updated information by visiting www.hamiltoncountyhealth.com and www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu regularly.

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NEWS

Get vaccinated

Vaccines are the most powerful public health tool for control of flu and everyone should consider receiving the H1N1 vaccine, upon availability. People that are at high risk for illness and therefore are a priority to receive the H1N1 vaccine include:

- Pregnant women
- People who live with or care for children younger than 6 months of age
- Health care and emergency services personnel
- Persons between the ages of 6 months through 24 years of age
- People ages 25 through 64 years with chronic health disorders or weakened immune systems

Don't forget about the seasonal flu vaccine! There is a lot of discussion about H1N1 flu, but the usual seasonal flu viruses are still expected to cause illness this fall and winter. While it won't protect you against H1N1 flu, the single best way to prevent the flu is to get a flu shot each fall. By getting a flu shot, you ensure that you will stay healthy and that you will not spread the flu to those who are at high risk for serious flu complications, such as the elderly, young children and people with certain health conditions.

Parents

- Review proper hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette with your children now – don't wait until they get sick.
- Be prepared in case you get sick and need to stay home for a week or so; a supply of over-the-counter medicines, alcohol-based hand rubs, tissues and other related items could be useful and help avoid the need to make trips out in public while you are sick and contagious.
- Make plans for emergency child care in case your child is ill and unable to attend school.

Businesses

- Discuss leniency for sick days to accommodate parents that may need to stay home with sick children.
- Review business continuity plans and think about what your organization will do if there are many employees out sick.

Churches

- Encourage members to cover their coughs and sneezes appropriately.
- Hang up informational posters or distribute educational flyers.

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Tim Ingram is the Health Commissioner for Hamilton County. Hamilton County Public Health works to assure the 450,000 citizens living outside the cities of Cincinnati, Norwood, Sharonville and Springdale are safe from disease, injury and contamination.