



9-16-09

Infection Control and Personal Protective Equipment Questions & Answers

Q. What can be done to reduce the chances of becoming infected with novel H1N1 Flu?

A. There are some simple actions you can take to protect yourself. No single action protects completely. The following steps when used together can help reduce your chances of becoming infected:

- **Know the signs and symptoms of the flu.** Symptoms of the flu include fever (100 degrees Fahrenheit or greater), cough, sore throat, a runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, and feeling very tired. For medical questions or concerns, contact your physician.
- **Practice good hand hygiene by washing your hands often with soap and water,** especially after coughing or sneezing. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
- **Cover you nose and mouth** with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, and throw it away after use.
- **Do not share eating utensils or drinking containers.** Persons should not share straws, cups, glasses, water bottles, used during sports or recreation, cigarettes, etc.
- **Stay home if you are sick** until at least 24 hours after there is no longer a fever or signs of a fever (without the use of fever-reducing medications).
- **Get your family vaccinated** for seasonal flu and 2009 H1N1 flu when vaccines are available.
- **Avoid close contact** (i.e., being within about 6 feet) with persons experiencing flu-like symptoms.

Q. What is Personal Protective Equipment?

A. Personal protective equipment (PPE) is any type of facemask, glove or clothing that acts as a barrier between infectious materials and the skin, mouth, nose, or eyes (mucous membranes). When used properly, PPE can help prevent the spread of infection from one person to another.

Q. Should facemasks or respirators be used at this time?

A. In community and home settings, the use of facemasks and respirators generally is not recommended. However, for certain circumstances, a facemask or respirator may be considered, specifically for persons at increased risk of severe illness from influenza. Use of N95 respirators or facemasks generally is not recommended for workers in non-healthcare occupational settings for general work activities. For specific work

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activities that involve contact with people who have influenza-like illness (ILI), such as escorting a person with ILI, interviewing a person with ILI, providing assistance to an individual with ILI, the following are recommended:

- workers should try to maintain a distance of 6 feet or more from the person with ILI;
- workers should keep their interactions with ill persons as brief as possible;
- the ill person should be asked to follow good cough etiquette and hand hygiene and to wear a facemask, if able, and one is available;
- workers at increased risk of severe illness from influenza infection (e.g., pregnant women; adults and children who have pulmonary, including asthma, diabetes, etc.) should avoid people with ILI (possibly by temporary reassignment); and,
- where workers cannot avoid close contact with persons with ILI, some workers may choose to wear a facemask or N95 respirator on a voluntary basis.

In the occupational healthcare setting, respiratory protection is recommended. Because infection control precautions, including respiratory protection, are imperfect, workers who are at increased risk of severe illness from influenza, and who are caring for a patient with known, probable, or suspected novel H1N1 or ILI, may consider temporary reassignment to avoid exposure.

A respirator that fits snugly on the face can filter out virus-containing small particle aerosols that can be generated by an infected person, but compared with a facemask it is harder to breathe through a respirator for long periods of time. Respirators are not recommended for children or people who have facial hair.

Where respirators are used in a non-occupational setting, fit testing, medical evaluation and training are recommended for optimal effectiveness.

When respiratory protection is required in an occupational healthcare setting, respirators must be used in the context of a comprehensive respiratory protection program as required under OSHA's Respiratory Protection standard (29 CFR 1910.134). This includes fit testing, medical evaluation and training of the worker. When required in the occupational setting, tight-fitting respirators cannot be used by people with facial hair that interferes with the face seal.

For further information and guidance: www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/masks.htm



H1N1 Hotline, available 24/7 - (630) 221-7600
www.protectdupage.org

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Q. What is the difference between a facemask and a respirator?

A. There are important differences between facemasks and respirators. **Facemasks** do not seal tightly to the face and are used to block large droplets from coming into contact with the wearer's mouth or nose. Facemasks also help stop droplets from being spread by the potentially infected and/or symptomatic person wearing them. Most **respirators** (e.g., N95) are designed to seal tightly to the wearer's face and filter out very small particles that can be breathed in by the user.

Q. How effective are facemasks and respirators in preventing the transmission of novel H1N1?

A. For both facemasks and respirators, limited data is available on their effectiveness in preventing transmission of novel H1N1 flu (or seasonal influenza) in various settings. However, the use of a facemask or respirator is likely to be of most benefit if used as early as possible when exposed to an ill person and when the facemask or respirator is used consistently.

Q. Are there other ways to prevent the spread of illness due to influenza?

A. Take everyday actions to stay healthy. **Practice good hand hygiene by washing your hands often with soap and water**, especially after you cough or sneeze. **Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.** **Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze**, and throw it away after use. **Stay home if you are sick until at least 24 hours after you are free of fever** without the use of fever-reducing medications. **Know the signs and symptoms of the flu.** Symptoms of the flu include fever (100 degrees Fahrenheit or greater), cough, sore throat, a runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headaches, and feeling very tired. For medical questions or concerns contact your physician. **Get your family and yourself vaccinated** for seasonal flu and 2009 H1N1 flu when vaccines are available.

For further information please visit www.protectdupage.org, www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/, or www.flu.gov.

Questions and Answers information adapted from www.cdc.gov influenza fact sheets.



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