

## **You too can help prevent influenza's spread**

*At Northwestern Memorial Hospital, our focus is on preventing the spread of H1N1 and seasonal influenza*

The H1N1 strain of influenza, commonly known as “swine flu,” is already widespread across much of the nation, including in Illinois, and the seasonal flu is starting to make an appearance as well. Experts are predicting that as many as half of the population of the United States could get H1N1 during this flu season, so physicians at Northwestern Memorial hope to get the word out about flu prevention.

## **What you can do to prevent the flu**

Preventing the flu is the single best way to slowing the spread of the virus. There are some important steps everyone can take to prevent influenza and to minimize the spread of the virus should they end up with the flu. Here's what you can do:

### **Get the vaccine**

- The seasonal flu vaccine is widely available now, and all are encouraged to get it to prevent infection with the seasonal flu. However, people in certain age and risk groups should always get the vaccine. For a complete list of who these groups are, see the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's page about seasonal flu
- The H1N1 flu vaccine is expected to be available sometime in mid- to late-October; however, it could be later. All are encouraged to get vaccinated if there is enough vaccine to go around, but if there is a shortage of vaccine, certain age and risk groups will get priority. These groups are different than those who are at high risk for complications of seasonal flu. For detailed information, view the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's page about H1N1 vaccine recommendations.

### **Clean your hands frequently**

We recommend thoroughly washing your hands and using alcohol-based hand sanitizer gel and wipes as often as possible. Keeping your hands away from your face and the faces and hands of others and washing your hands before eating or drinking can help prevent the spread of viral and bacterial infection.

- The main way influenza viruses are spread when a person comes into contact with infected respiratory droplets. This can happen when:
  - A person inhales the infected droplets that are in the air
  - A person touches a surface that contains infected droplets and then touches their eyes, nose or mouth (or the eyes, nose or mouth of another person) without thoroughly cleaning their hands

### **Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing**

When you sneeze or cough, any germs you have can be spread to others. You can lessen the spread of germs by covering your nose and mouth with a tissue any time you sneeze or cough. If you don't have a tissue, we recommend coughing or sneezing into your shirt sleeve rather than into your hands. If you use your hands and don't wash them instantly, you will leave germs on anything or anyone you touch, and if you cough or sneeze into the air, anyone who walks into that space can become infected simply by breathing.

## **If you are sick, stay home and away from others**

When you have the flu, you may continue to be contagious before you show symptoms and even after you start feeling better. Some people are contagious for more than seven days after the onset of symptoms. If you have any flu symptoms, even if they are mild, we recommend that you stay home and away from public places except to receive medical care. **If you have the flu, experts are requesting that you isolate yourself until your fever has been gone, without the aid of fever-reducing medications such as Tylenol, for at least 24 hours. If you have flu symptoms without a fever, ask your doctor when it's safe to go back to your normal routine.** While you are sick, you should stay home from work, school, travel, shopping, social events and public gatherings.

## **Try to avoid close contact with others who are sick**

Whenever possible, stay away from people who are sick. If you must care for a sick person, wash your hands frequently and consider following the CDC's guidelines for caring for people with the flu.

## **Talk with a physician if you have questions**

This is especially important if you are a member of a high-risk group.

High-risk groups are:

- **Pregnant women** - Pregnant women should take special precautions and should contact their physician if someone they are in close contact with gets the flu, as they may have to take antiviral medications
- **Children under age 5**
- **Individuals with certain chronic or immunosuppressive conditions**
- **Individuals under 19 who are receiving long-term aspirin therapy**
- **Adults 65 and over (seasonal flu only)** - Most recent studies have shown that adults age 65 and older do not seem to be at an increased risk for complications of H1N1 as they are with seasonal flu

## **Maintain good general health**

Getting adequate rest, staying physically active, managing stress, drinking plenty of fluids and eating balanced meals are healthy habits that can lessen the possibility of becoming ill.

## **What Northwestern Memorial Hospital is Doing to Prevent the Spread of Influenza Viruses**

At Northwestern Memorial, we take the health of our patients, our employees and the community very seriously. In an effort to help people prevent the spread of infection, we've installed kiosks throughout the hospital where anyone can get masks, sanitizing wipes and tissues.

We also offer the seasonal influenza vaccine to all employees free of charge, and we plan to offer the H1N1 vaccine when it's available.