

My Friend Has the Flu... FAQ's

My friend or roommate has been diagnosed with the Novel H1N1 (swine) Flu. Should I go to school and work?

Students who are well but who have an ill person at home with flu-like symptom can go to school and work as usual. These people should monitor their health every day, and take everyday precautions including washing their hands often with soap and water, especially after they cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective. If they become ill, they should notify their professors and/or supervisors and stay home. Those who have an underlying severe medical condition or who are pregnant should call their health care provider for advice because they might need to receive influenza antiviral drugs.

I have no symptoms, but my friend or roommate has been diagnosed with the Novel H1N1 (swine) Flu. Should I be tested for the Novel H1N1 flu?

No, there is no specific test for the H1N1 influenza virus available to clinical laboratories. The test for Novel H1N1 is only available through the public health laboratories. The Hillsborough County Health Department and the Florida Department of Health are only testing for this virus in hospitalized patients or in communities where there has been no confirmation of Novel H1N1 previously. This virus has already been confirmed in the Hillsborough County and surrounding communities, so there will be no further routine testing for H1N1 except in hospitalized patients.

I know someone who was tested for "swine flu" in their doctor's office. How can that be and will I need a test if I develop symptoms of influenza?

There is a rapid diagnostic test for Influenza A and/or B available for use in clinics and physician offices. This test helps in the diagnosis of **any** strain of Influenza A or Influenza B and does not test specifically for Novel H1N1. This is the only test available in doctor's offices or clinics – it is not a test for "swine flu".

Unlike many other laboratory tests which are extremely accurate, the Influenza A/B rapid test has a false negative rate of 30 to 90%. This means that, in 100 patients who have the flu, the test will be wrong in 30 to 90 of those patients and read negative when the patient actually does have the flu.

For these reasons, you may not be tested by your physician or clinic, especially if your symptoms are very clear cut. Research shows that health care providers are correct more than 80% of the time in diagnosing the flu.

If you have no symptoms, your rapid test for Influenza A/B will be negative. There is no test to predict whether you will come down with the flu after being exposed.

How long can an infected person spread this virus to others?

People infected with seasonal and novel H1N1 flu shed virus and may be able to infect others from 1 day before getting sick to 5 to 7 days after. This can be longer in some people, especially children and people with weakened immune systems and in people infected with the new H1N1 virus.

How long can influenza virus remain viable on objects (such as books and doorknobs)?

Studies have shown that influenza virus can survive on environmental surfaces and can infect a person for 2 to 8 hours after being deposited on the surface.

What surfaces are most likely to be sources of contamination? How do I clean my living area?

Germs can be spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose, or mouth. Droplets from a cough or sneeze of an infected person move through the air. Germs can be spread when a person touches respiratory droplets from another person on a surface like a desk, for example, and then touches their own eyes, mouth or nose before washing their hands. **The route into the body for infection is most often the eyes, nose and mouth.**

All the commercial antiseptic wipes and sprays are effective against the influenza virus.

What is CDC's recommendation regarding "swine flu parties"?

"Swine flu parties" are gatherings during which people have close contact with a person who has novel H1N1 flu in order to become infected with the virus. The intent of these parties is for a person to become infected with what for many people has been a mild disease, in the hope of having natural immunity novel H1N1 flu virus that might circulate later and cause more severe disease.

CDC does not recommend "swine flu parties" as a way to protect against novel H1N1 flu in the future. While the disease seen in the current novel H1N1 flu outbreak has been mild for many people, it has been severe and even fatal for others. There is no way to predict with certainty what the outcome will be for an individual or, equally important, for others to whom the intentionally infected person may spread the virus.

CDC recommends that people with novel H1N1 flu avoid contact with others as much as possible. If you are sick with flu-like illness, CDC recommends that you stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone except to get medical care or for other necessities. (Your fever should be gone without the use of a fever-reducing medicine.) Stay away from others as much as possible to keep from making others sick.

Will everyone diagnosed with Novel H1N1 (swine) Flu be given antiviral medications?

No, USF Student Health Services providers will be prescribing antiviral medications as necessary as recommended by the following CDC guidelines:

During the current pandemic, the priority use for influenza antiviral drugs is to treat severe influenza illness (for example hospitalized patients) and people who are sick who have a condition that places them at high risk for serious flu-related complications. If you have no chronic illness and are not pregnant, you will be considered low risk and advised of the supportive measures that will help you feel better as you convalesce.

Will the "usual" seasonal flu vaccine protect me from the Novel H1N1 Flu?

No, the flu shot that is available every year does not provide immunity for Novel H1N1 (swine) Flu. It is still highly recommended that you receive your seasonal flu vaccination as one component of a healthy lifestyle. When the Novel H1N1 vaccine becomes available, USF Student Health Services will likely collaborate with Hillsborough County Health Department in administering that vaccine.