

Take steps this flu season to stay healthy

Atlanta Medical Center has been closely monitoring the H1N1 flu outbreak in the United States, as we take the health and safety of our community, patients and employees very seriously.

We have stringent processes in place to manage the outbreak. If you would like more information about H1N1 flu, please visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Web site at <http://www.flu.gov>. The CDC's site includes key facts, number and location of confirmed cases and symptoms. The CDC also lists recommended everyday actions to help people stay healthy:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers also are effective.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread that way.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- Influenza is thought to spread mainly person-to-person through coughing or sneezing of infected people.
- If you get sick, CDC recommends that you stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.

Flu shots, including the new ones developed for H1N1 flu, may help prevent the flu or lessen its severity. The H1N1 vaccine is recommended for pregnant women, caregivers of children under the age of 6 months, everyone between the ages of 6 months and 24 years of age and anyone with health conditions that put them at higher risk. An additional seasonal flu vaccination also may be recommended. You should talk to your physician about what vaccinations you may need.

The main symptoms of H1N1 flu are the same as any other type of viral flu infection – fever (usually over 101° F), chills, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, head aches and fatigue. Some people also have diarrhea and vomiting.

Most people are able to recover at home. You should get plenty of rest and fluids like water and juices. You can take acetamophen or ibuprofen for fever, body aches and headaches, but be sure you follow directions to ensure you aren't taking too much. Remember that products containing aspirin should never be given to children or teenagers who have flu-like symptoms.

Certain antiviral drugs may be prescribed by your doctor, but must be given within the first 24 to 48 hours of symptoms. These medications may prevent the virus from spreading throughout your body.

H1N1 flu, like all other types of flu, may cause serious complications. If you experience the following symptoms, call your doctor or seek immediate medical care:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in your chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness or confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Flu-like symptoms that seem to improve but return with fever and a worse cough

Children who are developing complications may experience these additional symptoms:

- Rapid, troubled breathing
- Bluish or gray skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Not waking up or interacting
- Being so irritable that the child doesn't want to be held