



For Immediate Release

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## Tips for Cold and Flu Season

*From the California Association for Nurse Practitioners*

Cold and Influenza are among the most common infections of the respiratory system. The 2009 H1N1 (swine flu) is a new influenza virus that was first detected in the US in April, 2009. It has been found to have two genes from flu viruses that normally circulate in pigs in Europe and Asia and bird (avian) genes and human genes. Most people with the novel H1N1 virus have had mild illness. Cold and Flu are caused by viruses and are likely to occur during the winter months, however H1N1 has been shown to be resilient through warmer months. Since there is no known cure for colds or the flu, prevention should be your goal. No medicine or antibiotic will cure the infection; however controlling the symptoms will help you feel better until your body's defenses can control the virus. Cold symptoms develop slowly and include sore throat, stuffy or runny nose, congested head, cough, and fatigue with muscle aches. Flu symptoms, including the 2009 H1N1 flu usually appear suddenly and can include fever, stuffy nose, cough, headache and muscle aches, loss of appetite, and occasionally nausea/diarrhea. As we enter into cold and flu season this year, the California Association for Nurse Practitioners (CANP) has developed the following tips to stay healthy.

1. **Get a Flu shot.** The Center for Disease Control recommends that everyone get the flu shot, especially those who are considered higher risk. The CDC recommends certain target groups be prioritized to receive the 2009 H1N1 vaccine: pregnant women, people who live with or care for children under 6 months, healthcare personnel, persons age 6 months to 24 years, and persons 25 through 64 years with certain chronic medical conditions such as diabetes, asthma or COPD, cancer, blood disorders, heart disease, kidney and liver disorders, neurological disorders, neuromuscular disorders and others with weakened immune systems. The H1N1 vaccine recommendations are children under 10 years of age should get 2 doses, 4 weeks apart. A single dose is sufficient for those older than 10. Live nasal spray vaccine may be used for healthy kids and adults 2 years to 49 years of age who are not pregnant. The H1N1 vaccine is administered separately from the regular flu vaccine.
2. **Wash your hands.** Most cold and flu viruses are spread by hand to hand or skin to skin contact. The spread of the H1N1 virus is thought to be spread the same way. Germs can live for several hours and days on surfaces such as doorknobs, telephones, countertops, etc. Use tissue and cough or sneeze into a tissue and avoid using your hands. If this is unavoidable, turn your head and sneeze or cough into the crook of your elbow or on the fabric of your sleeve.
3. **What are the signs and symptoms of the H1N1 Virus?** The symptoms of 2009 flu virus in people include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people may have vomiting and diarrhea. These symptoms typically for most healthy individuals are mild and are treated with supportive care. Anyone who is concerned about their illness should consult a health care provider.
4. **Get a Good Night's rest.** Lack of sleep may profoundly weaken your immune system.
5. **Stay hydrated.** Drinking extra fluids and clear soups prevent dehydration caused by fever; can loosen mucus, and keeps your throat moist.
6. **Gargle with warm salt water.** Doing this a few times a day can relieve a sore throat. Throat sprays or lozenges may also help relieve the pain.
7. **Use saline (salt water) nose drops.** This will help loosen mucus, as well as using steam or humidified air in order to ease some congestion. Nasal saline sprays include Ocean, Simply Saline, Little Noses (for children), Afrin and Salinex. Nasal spray decongestants which include Afrin, 3-way, and Neo-Synephrine should not be used for more than three days.
8. **Return to Work/Child Care/School.** The CDC recommends that people with influenza-like illness remain at home until fever free (100 degrees F) for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medications. Employees who are well, but who have a family member at home with the H1N1 flu can go to work as usual. If you have an underlying medical condition or are pregnant call or see your health care provider for advice. Antiviral medication may be used for people who are very sick, or who are high risk for developing complications. Your health care provider will decide whether antiviral drugs are needed to treat your illness.

9. **Use over the counter medication.** Read the labels as many over the counter remedies offer “all in one” relief. Analgesics relieve body aches and pains and reduce fever. Examples include acetaminophen (Tylenol), Ibuprofen (Motrin/Advil), and Aleve. The most effective decongestants contain pseudoephedrine and are now no longer on the shelf at the pharmacy. They can still be obtained without a prescription, but you must ask the pharmacist for them. Expectorants such as Guaifenesin (Robitussin DM) can help to loosen secretions. Cough and cold preps are no longer recommended for children. Parents should contact their child’s health care provider for advice on management of their child’s cold.
  
10. **Consult your provider with extreme conditions.** In most cases, you do not need to see your provider when you have cold or flu symptoms except for the following: Adults should be seen for any worsening symptoms; especially trouble breathing or shortness of breath, pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen, sudden dizziness, confusion and severe or persistent vomiting. Children should be seen for any worsening symptoms such as fast breathing or trouble breathing, bluish skin color, not drinking enough fluids, not waking up or not interacting, being so irritable that the child does not want to be held, flu-like symptoms that improve but then return with fever and worse cough, and fever with a rash.

Additional information about the H1N1 flu virus can be found <http://cdc.gov/h1n1flu/qa.htm>

To schedule an interview with a CANP nurse practitioner to discuss these tips, contact Rob Finley at 916-441-1361.

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