# Pandemic H1N1 flu

**www.flu.oregon.gov**

# Senior citizens and the flu

## Introduction

Flu can be a very serious illness for older adults–it can lead to pneumonia and worsen symptoms from other chronic health conditions like asthma and heart disease. Most hospitalizations and deaths from the seasonal flu occur in people over the age of 65 who have underlying medical conditions. If you become ill with flu-like symptoms, be sure to call your health care provider right away.

## Vaccination is the best protection

- Everyone age 50 and older should get a seasonal flu shot as soon as possible this flu season. Nasal spray vaccine is not recommended for people over the age of 50.
- Getting a seasonal flu shot protects you and those around you. It's safe and you cannot get influenza from the vaccine.
- Get the vaccine as soon as it becomes available in your community because it takes the body about two weeks to build up immunity
- However, if you don't get your flu shot early, it's not too late to get it in December and beyond, since flu is most common in January and February, and can even continue into April.

## Pandemic H1N1 flu

- Recent studies show that adults 60 years of age and older may have some immunity to H1N1, however, seniors who have health conditions associated with a higher risk of flu complications should plan to get vaccinated against H1N1 as soon as vaccine is available. These conditions include cancer, blood disorders, chronic lung disease, heart disease, diabetes, asthma, and compromised immunity.
- H1N1 can be very serious among children and as a result, the H1N1 vaccine is being made available to children and other priority groups first. These groups include:
  o Pregnant women
  o People aged 6 months to 24 years
  o Health care workers
  o Those who live with or care for children under 6 months of age, and
  o People with chronic health problems or compromised immune systems.
- After the priority groups have been served, all seniors should plan to get the H1N1 flu shot. Getting vaccinated means not only protecting yourself, but not spreading the flu to your spouse, children, or grandchildren.

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## Take common-sense steps to protect yourself from the flu

- There are everyday actions that can help prevent the spread of germs that cause the flu. Take these common-sense steps to protect your health:
  - Cover your nose and mouth with your sleeve or 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 cleaners are also effective.
  - Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
  - Always stay home when you're sick, and limit contact with others to keep them from getting sick.
  - Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.

## Watch for signs that you may need immediate medical attention

- The symptoms of pandemic H1N1 are similar to the symptoms of regular flu and include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people have also experienced diarrhea and vomiting.
- Like seasonal flu, pandemic H1N1 may cause a worsening of underlying chronic medical conditions.
- Seek emergency medical care if you become ill and experience any of the following warning signs:
  - Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
  - Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
  - Sudden dizziness
  - Confusion
  - Severe or persistent vomiting.
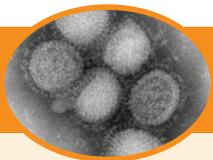
# For more information

**Oregon Public Health Division**
**www.flu.oregon.gov**

**Oregon Public Health Hotline**
**1-800-978-3040**

**Oregon county health departments**
**www.oregon.gov/DHS/ph/lhd/lhd.shtml**

**Federal pandemic H1N1 flu information**
**www.flu.gov**

**World Health Organization**
**www.who.int**

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