

H1N1 flu ("Swine flu") and your child Cabarrus Pediatrics 2009

H1N1 is not fun but it is not any worse than regular seasonal flu. It is not avian flu or ebola virus! The main difference between H1N1 and regular flu is that none of us have immunity to it so it is spreading like wildfire.

The classic three symptoms of H1N1 influenza are:

1. Sudden onset of fever over 100 (usually 101 - 104).
2. Significant coughing.
3. Significant body aches.

Runny nose, sore throat, red eyes, vomiting, and diarrhea can also be present but don't help make the diagnosis. Symptoms typically last 7-14 days. A small minority of patients will develop complications such as pneumonia so it is important to let us know if your child's symptoms seem to suddenly worsen. Flu is spread by contact with saliva/mucous droplets from coughing, sneezing, etc..

The rapid test for flu is quite inaccurate for H1N1. Studies show it is only accurate in 10-70% of cases. That's not very helpful! The best way to diagnose flu is by symptoms.

As your child's pediatricians we are committed to giving your child the best care. We are frequently reviewing expert recommendations. ***The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) (www.cdc.gov), is instructing physicians not to use anti-flu medications (like Tamiflu or Relenza) in healthy children over the age of 5 years with H1N1 symptoms or exposure to H1N1 unless they are sick enough to need hospitalization (a very uncommon situation).*** Children younger than 5 years old or older children with chronic diseases such as asthma can be considered for treatment if they present within 24-48 hours of symptom onset. These medications are not a miracle cure. At best they only slightly decrease symptoms and/or shorten the length of illness by 1 to 2 days. That's not much for an illness that can last 7-14 days.

The best treatment for most cases of flu is rest, fluids, and ibuprofen. The best way to prevent the spread of flu is to keep away from ill people, wash your hands, and when you are coughing cough into your elbow not your hands. If your child has had the flu don't send him/her to school until they have been without fever over 100 for at least 24 hours, are not coughing frequently, and feel well enough to participate in class.

We recommend that all children over the age of 6 months receive a regular flu vaccine. This fall we will be holding a walk-in flu vaccine clinic for our patients as we did last year. Watch for a banner on our front lawn and also our website (www.cabarruspeds.org) for details. When the H1N1 vaccine is released (hopefully in October or November) we will begin giving it as well.

For detailed, up-to-date information on H1N1 flu please visit www.cdc.gov.

Take home points:

- 1. H1N1 flu is not any more dangerous than regular seasonal flu.**
- 2. Most children with H1N1 symptoms do not need to see the doctor.**
- 3. Rapid flu tests are not needed for children with classic H1N1 symptoms.**
- 4. Tamiflu and Relenza are not recommended for most healthy children over the age of 5 for H1N1 symptoms or exposure to H1N1.**
- 5. The best way to prevent the spread of H1N1 is by good hand washing.**
- 6. The best treatment for the H1N1 is ibuprofen (motrin), rest, and fluids.**
- 7. H1N1 symptoms can last for 7-14 days.**