

# H1N1: Separating Myth from Fact

Thursday, August 13, 2009

**FOX NEWS**  
Marrecca Fiore



Reuters

This handout photo shows technician holding a master H1N1 virus sample for the pre-production of vaccine at laboratory in Germany.

**With the world facing its first pandemic in 41 years, it's easy to get caught up in all the hullabaloo that's circulating about the swine flu.**

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says the worst could be yet to come, so Americans need to prepare for a large outbreak this fall and winter as children return to school and people spend more time congregating indoors.

To best prepare, it's important to separate fact from fiction.

Here are 10 of the most common myths about H1N1:

## **1. H1N1 is worse than seasonal flu.**

So far, there is no data to back up this statement. What worries health officials is that it's a strain of the flu that has never been seen before.

However, the number of deaths from H1N1 in the U.S. is above 300 or about 1 percent of those who have been infected with the virus. This is far lower than the 36,000 people who die annually in the U.S. from seasonal flu. H1N1 does, however, appear to be harder on pregnant women than seasonal flu and health experts are encouraging women who are pregnant or are thinking of becoming pregnant to get vaccinated once the H1N1 immunization becomes available.

## **2. I'm healthy so I don't need to worry about swine flu.**

Wrong. Swine flu, like seasonal flu, can infect anyone. What's worse is that teens, young adults and pregnant women, who are not usually at high risk for developing complications from the regular flu, appear to be at risk for hospitalization and even death from swine flu.

“With swine flu, there are certain groups with worse outcomes, including pregnant women, who may think they're healthy but are being negatively impacted,” said Dr. Amy Ray, an infectious disease and public health specialist with University Hospitals Case Medical Center in Cleveland,

Ohio. “People with underlying heart and lung disease, even mild asthmatics, appear to be prone to more negative outcomes.”

### **3. The swine flu vaccine will give me the flu.**

This is the same myth that haunts doctors each year when the seasonal flu vaccine becomes available.

“The flu vaccine we are creating is done using egg-based technology containing particles of dead virus, so there is no way to transmit influenza from an influenza vaccine,” Ray said. “The reason people feel that they’ve gotten the flu from the flu vaccine is because flu season occurs at the same time as cold season and they’ve confused the common cold with the flu. Also, the low fever that some people experience after they’re inoculated is not a symptom of the flu, but a symptom of a healthy immune system fighting off an insult that has been introduced into the body.”

### **4. Vaccines are dangerous. I’ll just bring my child to a swine flu party where she’ll get the virus and build a natural immunity to it.**

“I am opposed to any kind of swine flu party,” Ray said. “I prefer my vaccines to be FDA approved. The risk from the vaccine is far, far, far less than the risk of actual exposure to the virus. With these swine flu and measles parties, you’re actually getting the disease rather than getting inoculated against the disease. This is not recommended and can be dangerous.”

### **5. Wearing a mask will protect me from swine flu.**

Wrong again. “The recommendation is not to wear a face mask,” Ray said. “First of all, they’re only good for a short amount of time and as soon as they get moist, which is pretty quickly, they become ineffective. The best advice is that if you’re sick, stay home. Also stay away from folks who are sick and make sure your hands are clean, and practice good cough etiquette.”

### **6. Using hand sanitizer isn’t as effective as washing your hands.**

Hand sanitizers have been shown to be very effective in killing the swine flu virus and should be used not only by people trying to prevent catching the virus, but also by people who have the virus to keep from spreading it to others.

### **7. If H1N1 is a variant of swine flu, I should stop eating pork.**

This is “absolutely” a myth, said Ray. “All indications are that this virus is spread from person to person via respiratory droplets, which are passed from a sick person into the mucous membranes (eyes, nose, mouth) of a susceptible host.”

### **8. I’m canceling my child’s trip to a petting zoo because it has piglets and I’m afraid he’ll catch swine flu.**

There is no evidence that the virus is being spread from pig to person, and there is no reason to cancel a trip to a petting zoo for fear of H1N1. Ray said children should be sure to clean their hands with soap and water or hand sanitizer after touching any farm animal, not only pigs, especially before eating.

**9. I should stop shaking hands with people.**

“People can still shake hands with each other as long as they are not symptomatic,” Ray said. “Again, the swine flu takes a respiratory route of transmission through coughing and sneezing and landing on a susceptible host.”

Doctors recommend that after shaking hands, people should wash them or use hand sanitizer before they touch their mouths, noses or eyes.

**10. If I get the regular flu shot each year, I don’t need to get the swine flu shot too.**

“The regular flu shot was formulated before we knew about H1N1, so it does not offer protection against H1N1,” Ray said.

The seasonal flu shot will more than likely be available earlier this year, and people who normally get the shot should continue to do so.

“Certain groups will need to get both, including health care workers, pregnant women, people between the ages of 6 months and 24 years, household contacts of children under the age of 6 months and people age 24 to 65 with compromised immune systems. So there will be some crossover, and people should talk to their doctors about whether they should get both.”

**11. I have a sore throat and have been coughing and sneezing, so I have swine flu.**

“Really for both seasonal influenza and H1N1, the symptoms are a high-grade fever – typically above 101 degrees — headache, body aches, coughing, and occasionally, more so with swine flu than seasonal flu, there is some nausea and vomiting.”