

# H1N1 (Swine Flu)

## Questions and Answers

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### GENERAL INFORMATION

#### Why is “swine flu” now being called “H1N1 flu?”

There are many types and strains of influenza (or flu) viruses. Swine flu is the term used to describe flu viruses that normally infect pigs but can also infect humans and other species.

The virus associated with the 2009 worldwide influenza outbreak was originally referred to as swine flu since the virus contains several proteins that are common to many swine flu viruses. CDC is no longer referring to this virus as swine flu because there is no evidence this particular strain has caused significant disease in pigs. The virus is now being called the novel 2009 influenza A H1N1 virus or, more simply, the H1N1 flu.

#### Where can I get more information about H1N1?

Resources for general questions about H1N1 Flu (Swine Flu)

- CDC H1N1 website: [http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/swineflu\\_you.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/swineflu_you.htm)
- PandemicFlu.gov website: <http://www.pandemicflu.gov/fag/swineflu/>

#### What is the difference between Tamiflu/Relenza (Antivirals) and a vaccine?

##### *Antivirals*

Antiviral drugs are prescription medicines (pills, liquid, or an inhaler) that fight against the flu by keeping flu viruses from reproducing in your body. If you get sick, antiviral drugs can make your illness milder and make you feel better faster. They may also prevent serious flu complications. Antivirals can also be used to prevent infection in potentially exposed persons, but such use is currently recommended by the CDC in only limited circumstances.

The trade names for the drugs effective against the 2009 H1N1 virus are Tamiflu and Relenza. During the current outbreak, the priority use for these antivirals is to treat those with severe symptoms and/or persons who are at high-risk for complications from influenza infection (e.g. immunocompromised persons, pregnant women, children  $\leq 5$  years, or adults  $\geq 65$  years).

##### *Vaccine*

Vaccines are given to prevent infections. Influenza vaccines are made from either pieces of the killed influenza virus or weakened versions of the live virus that will not lead to disease. When vaccinated, the body's immune system makes antibodies which will fight off infection if exposure to the virus occurs. The current seasonal flu vaccine is not likely to be effective against the 2009 H1N1 outbreak strain. CDC is in the early stages of developing a vaccine effective against the H1N1 virus; such a vaccine is not expected to be available for several months.

## NPS SPECIFIC

### **What should I do to protect myself if I encounter and/or assist a sick visitor?**

If you have close contact with a visitor exhibiting symptoms consistent with H1N1 flu (e.g. fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, and/or fatigue), the following actions will help to reduce your risk of infection:

- Minimize close contact with the sick visitor. If possible, try to maintain a distance of at least 6 feet between you and the visitor.
- Encourage the visitor to cover his/her mouth when coughing or sneezing
- Thoroughly wash your hands with soap and water and/or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer (containing  $\geq 60\%$  alcohol) as soon as possible
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
- If you must have prolonged contact with a sick visitor (e.g. a sick visitor who is detained by law enforcement personnel), consider these additional actions:
  - Continue to minimize close contact with the visitor
  - If possible, isolate the visitor in a private room or area
  - If available, provide a surgical mask for the visitor to wear, which may minimize spread of germs by coughing or sneezing
  - Consider wearing a properly fitted N-95 respirator
  - Consider requesting further evaluation by EMS or other healthcare personnel

### **I handle money in my position. Can I get H1N1 (Swine Flu) from handling money?**

Yes. Studies have shown that viruses, including influenza viruses, can survive on both hard surfaces (e.g. countertops, tables) and on porous materials (e.g., money, clothing). Depending on the conditions and other factors, these viruses may remain viable on surfaces for several hours, days, or even weeks. To limit transmission of viruses from contaminated surfaces and items, the CDC recommends frequent handwashing, use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers, and avoiding touching your eyes, mouth, and nose. Use of hand sanitizers is particularly recommended in settings where handwashing facilities are not readily available.

### **How do I disinfect my area?**

Disinfect all hard non-porous surfaces with any disinfectant labeled as effective against Influenza A viruses. Bleach, Lysol, Ethyl Alcohol and Quaternary Ammonium are common sanitizers that are labeled as effective by EPA. Use all sanitizers according to label instructions and NEVER mix different sanitizers. Mixing some sanitizers can result in the release of hazardous and fatal gases.

### **Should I wear face masks to protect myself now while at work?**

No, respirators currently aren't required. Employees should follow the practices of social distancing (maintaining at least 6' distance from others), frequent hand washing (20 seconds continuous with soap and water), hand sanitizing if washing facilities aren't available, and avoiding touching your face with your hands. Employees requiring protective equipment will be notified when the need for respirators exists.

### **When we're notified respirators are needed, what type should we wear?**

NPS employees that are determined to have occupational exposure to individuals potentially infected with H1N1 will be provided and wear disposable N95 type respirators (filters 95% of airborne contaminants). Respirators will be worn per the requirements of Reference Manual RM 50B, Section 4.3, *Respiratory Protection*.

**We have several large gathering points at our park, such as an auditorium/movie theater/boat ride/cave tour. What should we do if a visitor shows up and appears ill with flu-like symptoms (e.g., coughing/sneezing not due to allergies)?**

In areas where large crowds may gather, consider posting the following NPS/CDC sign emphasizing the importance of good cough etiquette and hand hygiene habits. (To download, click here: [Cough and Cover Poster](#)). Consider having an interpretive ranger or other group leader state that, if someone is sick, he/she should consider not participating in the event. Have the brochure “Recommendations for Visitors with Influenza-Like Symptoms” readily available. (The brochure is available on InsideNPS, on the H1N1 website, in the [General Information Links and Documents](#) section, under **Documents**.)

**What should I do to assist an ill visitor that reports symptoms of H1N1 flu (fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue)?**

Provide the visitor information on the nearest available medical services and the brochure titled “Recommendations for Visitors with Influenza-Like Symptoms.” (The brochure is available on InsideNPS, on the H1N1 website, in the [General Information Links and Documents](#) section, under **Documents**.)

**We hire seasonal employees who may be arriving from states/countries with cases of H1N1 flu. Do we need to be concerned or taking any action regarding potentially ill seasonal employees arriving in our park?**

At this time, no extraordinary measures are needed.

- Provide employees with information on reporting illness symptoms to their supervisors and locations of the nearest medical care facilities.
- Ill employees with influenza-like symptoms should minimize contact with others and not work for at least 7 days after symptom onset or 24-48 hours after symptoms have resolved, whichever is longer.
- If feasible, consider setting up separate housing and dining arrangements for ill employees.
- If a newly hired seasonal employee would like more information, they may be directed to InsideNPS and select the Swine Flu link on the right hand side of the page.

## **HUMAN RESOURCES**

**Are there special rules on absence and leave that go into effect if there is a pandemic or health emergency?**

While the Office of Personnel Management has stressed that regular leave rules and regulations remain in effect during a pandemic emergency, the leave rules will be interpreted liberally. Employees who need to be off work due to illness or the need to care for family members may use any appropriate combination of sick leave, annual leave, credit hours, compensatory time, leave without pay, etc.

**Do I have to take leave if the park is closed?**

No. In the event your park or office is closed as part of what’s called “social distancing,” the effort to limit the spread of disease, employees will be placed on administrative (paid) leave.

**If the office is closed and I’m therefore unable to record my biweekly time and attendance, will I still get paid?**

Yes. Special provisions go into effect to get affected employees automatically paid based on an 80-hour pay period. Any corrections to reflect any leave taken or different hours worked would be made later.

### **Can I telework instead of being at the office in the event of a pandemic?**

It depends on your job. Telework is a key part of the “social distancing” effort by Federal agencies as they work to limit the spread of disease, and will be used to the maximum extent possible in the event of such an emergency. Of course, due to the nature of our work, the National Park Service has fewer jobs whose essential duties can be performed through teleworking than some other agencies. For example, if you’re a Law Enforcement Ranger protecting visitors and resources, or you’re collecting fees at the park entrance, it’s not possible to do that from a remote location. Other positions occupied by NPS employees can be partly performed through telework, and still others are fully or largely amenable to telework. It’s a case-by-case determination, rather than one size fits all.

Temporary telework arrangements may be terminated at the end of the emergency.

### **Who makes the decision on whether I can telework?**

Supervisors have delegated authority to determine whether the essential duties of a position can be performed using telework. If you are a member of a Bargaining Unit, there may be provisions of the Collective Bargaining Agreement that apply.

### **How can I get ready to telework if it becomes necessary?**

If your position can be performed full- or part-time using telework, you and your supervisor should complete a Telework Agreement, even if you don’t regularly telework. This “ad hoc” agreement will allow your supervisor to authorize telework immediately whenever it’s necessary or desirable. To find the format for telework agreements and the DOI regulations governing telework, go to <http://www.doi.gov/hrm/guidance/PB05-02t.pdf>. You and your supervisor should adjust the agreement to fit your particular situation.

Also, if you’ll be using a home or government computer, be sure to review the latest Information Technology Security rules and procedures to ensure that virus protection is in place, systems are secure, and government and personal information is protected.

### **What happens to my benefits in an emergency?**

In an emergency situation, Federal employees and retirees need not worry about their Federal benefits. Benefits coverage will continue regardless of the severity of the emergency.

### **Can I contact OPM with questions about benefits?**

Yes. We encourage all employees to contact your NPS Servicing Human Resources Office first. They are there to help you and answer all of your questions. Your regional HR office is also available to assist you.

However, OPM does have an emergency phone number and email address for information concerning your benefits. The number has now been activated. It’s 1-800-307-8298 and can be used both by employees and retirees. Right now, it’s operating Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. through 8:00 p.m. The greeting is an automated response; however, if the caller remains on the line, a live operator will come on and answer your question.

For questions by email, the address is [emergencybenefits@opm.gov](mailto:emergencybenefits@opm.gov).

### **Where can I get information online about HR aspects of a pandemic or other emergency?**

There is a wealth of information available. Start at [www.opm.gov/pandemic](http://www.opm.gov/pandemic), which has information for employees, managers, and HR offices. Also check out “A Federal Employee’s Emergency Guide,” at [www.opm.gov/emergency/PDF/EmployeesGuide.pdf](http://www.opm.gov/emergency/PDF/EmployeesGuide.pdf).

OPM's "Handbook on Pay and Leave Benefits for Federal Employees Affected by Severe Weather Conditions or Other Emergency Situations," can be found at <http://www.opm.gov/oca/compmemo/2005/2005-18hb.pdf>.

**If I contract the flu while at work, will I be covered by workers' compensation?**

If an employee believes H1N1 (Swine Flu) was contracted as a result of a work-related exposure, he or she is able to file a workers' compensation claim. A *Form CA-1, Notice of Traumatic Injury and Claim for Continuation of Pay/Compensation* should be filed if the exposure can be documented to have taken place during one work shift. File a *Form CA-2, Notice of Occupational Disease and Claim for Compensation* if the exposure was for more than one work shift. The Department of Labor rules on entitlement to workers' compensation, and each case will be judged on its own merit.

Additional information can be found on the OWCP website:

<http://www.dol.gov/esa/owcp/dfec/index.htm>