



Why H1N1 Flu is Still Important **Swine “flew away,” now H1N1 is here to stay!**

As we move into the New Year, you may be wondering if H1N1 flu (formerly known as “swine flu”) is still a concern.

Pandemic flu viruses can be unpredictable and have the potential to impact otherwise healthy people. Keep reading to find out why you shouldn’t forget about the H1N1 flu virus too soon.

Flu Activity is still high

In California, illnesses due to H1N1 remain widespread. The number of cases is going down, but cases of serious illness and even death are still happening. Certain groups, including pregnant women and infants, are still at high risk for serious complications from H1N1 flu.

Flu may be leveling off, but it isn’t going away. It is still present at levels well above average for this time of year both nationally and in California.

H1N1 is the dominant flu strain

Public Health laboratory testing shows that H1N1 is still the leading strain of flu virus making people sick around the state.

The H1N1 virus has not mutated (changed) very much, which is good news. This means that the H1N1 vaccine continues to be the best protection against this flu.

Most people are still at risk of getting sick

The California Department of Public Health now estimates that 4.3 million Californians have already been infected with H1N1.

As of December 22, 2009, 12 million doses of vaccine have been shipped to health care providers in California. That represents more than half of the expected total of H1N1 vaccine

However, California’s population is over 36 million people, which means that a majority of Californians have not had the H1N1 virus or received the vaccine, so they are still at risk of getting sick from H1N1.

Public Health officials continue to encourage Californians to get vaccinated and to practice good hygiene to protect themselves from the flu.

Riding the Pandemic Waves

Historically, illness caused by pandemic influenza viruses has come in waves. A wave is a peak in the number of flu cases.

The first wave of illness was in the spring and early summer of 2009. We are seeing the decline of the second wave now. It is impossible to predict if or when there will be a third wave, but we know that it is very unlikely that H1N1 will disappear completely.

When there is a slowdown in flu activity and an increase in the vaccine supply, it is important to take this window of opportunity to get vaccinated. It will protect you and might help prevent or reduce the severity of a third wave.

The Bottom Line

H1N1 flu cases may be dropping off now, but we don't know what will happen in the next few months.

H1N1 is still causing serious illness and even death. Therefore it is still extremely important to:

- Get the H1N1 vaccine when it becomes available to you.
- Practice good hygiene and other healthy habits including:
 - If you're sick, stay home and away from others until at least 24 hours after your fever is gone without use of fever reducing medicine
 - Wash your hands often with soap and warm water
 - Cover coughs and sneezes with your sleeve or a tissue
 - Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth
 - Keep your distance from people coughing and sneezing
 - Teach your kids these healthy habits too!

For the latest information check the **Napa County Public Health** website at: <http://www.co.napa.ca.us/publichealth>, the **CDC** website at <http://www.cdc.gov/H1N1flu> or call the automated **Napa County Public Health** hotline at **(707) 253-4540**.