

What do I need to know about influenza and swine flu?

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For many allergy and asthma sufferers who are already coping with respiratory conditions, catching an influenza virus can make your symptoms worse.

Flu viruses are spread mainly from person to person through coughing or sneezing. Individuals may also become infected by touching a contaminated surface and then touching their nose, eyes or mouth.

Given concerns about the swine flu virus, it is important to stay aware of your symptoms, but not to panic. If you suspect you may be infected by influenza, call your physician to discuss your symptoms. Your doctor can advise you what to do next.

Here are some practical tips from the AAAAI and the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) to help reduce flu transmission:

1. Clean your hands often. Hand washing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds after touching objects, surfaces or another person's hands can physically remove influenza viruses. Alcohol-based hand cleaners can also prevent the spread of germs.
2. Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough. Clean your hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand cleanser afterward.
3. Limit your exposure (even brief contact) to people with flu symptoms, especially during the first several days of their illness. People with influenza should be considered contagious as long as they are symptomatic and possibly for up to seven days and more following the onset of symptoms. It is also possible to transmit a flu virus to another person before you have symptoms. If you have the flu, it is best to stay in a designated room as much as possible to reduce contamination in the house.
4. Don't touch your face, especially your eyes and nose. Germs are often spread when you touch something that has been contaminated by someone with the virus and then rubbing your eye, nose or mouth. Viruses may remain active on surfaces for two hours and possibly longer.
5. Routinely clean and disinfect. Remember disinfecting actually destroys germs, whereas simple cleaning may not. Follow instructions for all disinfectants. Use a paper towel to turn off sink water faucets.
6. Stay home when you are infected with the flu virus unless you need to seek medical care. If possible, wear a face mask around the house and especially if you go outside so that you can reduce the risk of infecting others.
7. Always have your allergy and asthma medications on hand, especially if you are travelling or away from home. Influenza viruses may make your asthma worse, so be sure you have an updated action plan from your allergist or asthma specialist.
8. Patients under 18 years of age should not take aspirin or aspirin-containing products if they have the flu.
9. Also, be aware that some medications may be effective against influenza viruses if taken early (typically within 48 hours of first experiencing symptoms). **Get help immediately** if you have: difficulty breathing or chest pain, purple or blue discolored lips, vomiting, dehydration, seizures, or become confused or less responsive than normal. Remember, the regular flu shot IS NOT protective against swine flu! Be proactive about your health and those around you.

For more information, visit <http://www.pandemicflu.gov/>