

Just the facts: Swine flu

by Dr. Stuart Beeber

Editor's note: As a service to our readers, local pediatrician Dr. Stuart Beeber has sorted through all the information swirling in the media about swine flu and prepared a "Frequently Asked Questions" presentation for easy reference. [Click here to download and print out a pdf version suitable for hanging on your refrigerator for peace of mind.](#)

Symptoms & Prevention

1. *What is the difference between swine flu and H1N1?* There is none. H1N1 is the medical name and swine flu is the name most of us use.
2. *What are some of the distinguishing features of swine flu and regular flu?* The symptoms are the same for both. Fever, muscle aches, headaches, chills and marked fatigue are very characteristic of both illnesses. Sore throat and cough are not specific for flu and can be present in non-flu viral illnesses and in bacterial diseases. Intestinal symptoms like abdominal pain, vomiting or diarrhea without the other symptoms described above are probably not flu or swine flu.
3. *How bad is the swine flu?* As it appears now, most cases are mild and no more serious than regular flu. It is important to realize this and not to panic.
4. *What can I do to prevent catching swine flu?* Besides getting the swine flu vaccine, try to avoid contact with people with flu-like illnesses. If you must be near sick people, it is advised that you stay six feet away. Frequent hand washing is one of the best ways to avoid catching this disease. The possible beneficial effects of wearing regular surgical masks are controversial. The use of a special N95 respirator mask is better.
5. *How can the spread of swine flu be prevented?* The best way is to isolate sick patients, i.e. keep sick children out of school and have ill adults stay home from work.

Vaccination & Treatment

6. *When can I get the swine flu vaccine?* It probably will not be available until mid-October, or even later. After being vaccinated, it will then take a few weeks for your body to make protective antibodies.
7. *Where can I get a swine flu shot?* Decisions about where and how the vaccine will be distributed will be made by the New York State Health Department. They have not received the vaccine yet and they have not announced a distribution

plan.

8. *Will it be available in doctor's offices?* According to the New York State Health Department, doctors can sign up to receive the vaccine at no cost on a voluntary basis.
9. *Who should get the swine flu vaccine?* Pregnant mothers, children and young adults ages 6 months to 24 years old, and adults who are at high risk will be given priority. In addition, health care workers and persons taking care of infants less than six months old will be given preference.
10. *How many shots will be required?* It has recently been announced that the swine flu vaccine will only require one injection.
11. *Is the regular flu vaccine available now?* Yes, most doctors' offices have it now. I recommend that you get your regular flu shot ASAP. There is no such thing as getting it too early. If you wait too long, your doctor's office may be overwhelmed and there might not be any vaccine left.
12. *If I get the regular flu vaccine, will it protect against swine flu?* No.
13. *If I get the swine flu vaccine, will it protect against the regular flu?* No.
14. *If I had a recent illness that may have been swine flu, is there a way to find out for sure?* No.
15. *Will antibiotics treat swine flu or regular flu?* No, swine flu and regular flu are viral illnesses. Antibiotics are used only to treat bacterial infections.
16. *What about the antiviral agent Tamiflu?* It is not recommended for general use as a preventive measure and most doctors are using it only in severely ill patients, especially those who require, or almost require, hospitalization. Tamiflu does have side effects and is costly. It is not a "cure all."

Status of swine flu

17. *Which will come first, swine flu or the regular flu?* Swine flu will probably start sooner. Regular flu will probably surface after the first of the year.
18. *Is there swine flu around now?* In this Northern Westchester area, there have been a few suspected cases. These have not been confirmed by H1N1 testing because this test is not routinely available. However, a significant number of cases

have already been reported in Atlanta, Georgia; North Carolina; Washington State University; and Cornell University in Ithaca, New York.

19. Is it possible that there will be a large number of cases locally before the swine flu vaccine is available? Yes.

20. *Where is the best place to get information about swine flu?* The CDC, www.cdc.gov/H1N1flu, the New York State Health Department, www.health.state.ny.us/diseases/communicable/influenza/h1n1/, and the Westchester County Health Department, www.westchestergov.com/health, all have excellent web sites that are updated frequently.