

Public Guidance Regarding Emergency Department Use for H1N1 Flu Symptoms

This guidance is being provided to help people 18 or older to decide whether their **flu-like** symptoms warrant the use of their local emergency department during an outbreak of influenza. Emergency physicians are always there to see patients who are ill and in need of emergency care. *Nothing in this document is intended to supersede the use of common sense in deciding when to seek emergency medical care.*

The members of the American College of Emergency Physicians (ACEP) want to ensure that they are able to provide care for all emergency conditions, even during an outbreak of influenza. It is important that our national medical resources be used efficiently. The following guidelines can help people obtain the appropriate medical care for their particular situations.

For children less than 18 years old with flu like symptoms please contact their physician or see this CDC guidance for parents and caregivers. <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/parents/>



The guidance document was produced under contract to and in collaboration with the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response (ASPR) and the Emergency Care Coordination Center (ECCC).

This guidance was last updated on **October 8, 2009**.

If you are 18 or older and have symptoms that feel like the flu:

Do you have a fever or feel feverish and have a cough and/or sore throat?

If No, it is **unlikely that you require emergency care** for influenza at this point in your illness.

If Yes: Do you have any of the following warning signs of severe illness:

- Difficulty breathing or chest pain?
- Breathing rate over 24 breaths per minute?
- Purple or blue discoloration of the lips?
- Vomiting and inability to keep liquids down
- Signs of dehydration (Examples include headache, extreme thirst, dizziness when standing, and decreased urination)
- Confusion or change in either behavior or alertness?
- Convulsions or seizure?
- If you have a blood pressure device, is the top number less than 100?

If Yes to any of these questions: You should **go to the emergency department** for evaluation.

If all answers are No: Do you have any of the following conditions?

- Age 65 or older
- Diabetes
- Pregnancy
- Severely overweight
- Have an organ transplant
- HIV/AIDS
- Require kidney dialysis
- Chronic Heart Disease (congestive heart failure or severe coronary artery disease)
- Receiving or completed chemotherapy in past 30 days
- Have an immune compromised condition or taking steroid medications (like cortisone)
- Sickle cell
- Cirrhosis
- Chronic breathing difficulty such as asthma, cystic fibrosis, emphysema or Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD)
- A disease that weakens the muscles such as multiple sclerosis (MS) or spinal cord injury
- A disease that makes it hard to think or remember such as stroke, brain injury, dementia, or Alzheimer's

If you have any of these conditions, and you have a fever or feel feverish and have a cough and/or sore throat, You should **call your primary care physician or seek care from a walk-in clinic**.

If you **do not have one of these conditions** or warning signs of severe illness: You should rest at home until you feel better. You may also take medicine, such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen for your fever. You should rest, eat well and drink plenty of fluids.

If you get worse, you may apply this guidance again to help you decide about seeking emergency care. If you feel that you are having an emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department.

Whenever you are sick, you should be extra careful to stay away from other people who are well and wash your hands frequently in soap and water or an alcohol hand sanitizer.

You are encouraged to get the seasonal flu vaccine and the H1N1 vaccine when it becomes available.

This tool is designed only for general educational purposes to assist users in identifying indicators of and responses to flu-like symptoms. It does not provide guidance for other medical conditions nor is it intended to substitute for professional medical advice. Like any printed material it may become out of date over time. Always seek the advice of your health care professional with any questions you have regarding a medical condition.