



**Public Health**  
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

## Pike County General Health District

# *H1N1 Influenza & Faith-Based Communities*

### **What is H1N1 Influenza**

H1N1 (often referred to as “swine flu”) is a new (type A) influenza virus causing illness in people. This new virus was first detected in people in the United States in April 2009. This virus is spreading from person-to-person worldwide, probably in much the same way that regular seasonal influenza viruses spread. On June 11, 2009, the World Health Organization signaled that a pandemic of 2009 H1N1 flu was underway.

### **Symptoms and Associated Infections**

H1N1 flu virus infection can cause a wide range of symptoms, including fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people have reported diarrhea and vomiting. Like seasonal flu, H1N1 flu in humans can vary in severity from mild to severe. Severe disease with pneumonia, respiratory failure and even death is possible with H1N1 flu infection. Sometimes bacterial infections may occur at the same time as or after infection with influenza viruses and lead to pneumonias, ear infections, or sinus infections.

### **How Influenza Spreads**

The main way that influenza viruses are thought to spread is from person to person in respiratory droplets of coughs and sneezes. This can happen when droplets from a cough or sneeze of an infected person are propelled through the air and deposited on the mouth or nose of people nearby. Influenza viruses may also be spread when a person touches respiratory droplets on another person or an object and then touches their own mouth or nose (or someone else’s mouth or nose) before washing their hands.

### **Who is at Risk?**

Although there is still much that remains unknown about H1N1 influenza, it appears that this strain may be more prevalent and/or severe in different groups of people than seasonal influenza. Currently, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have suggested that pregnant women, individuals birth to 24 years old, and people 24 to 64 years old with chronic health conditions may have increased risk for severe illness and complications associated with H1N1 influenza. However, it is important to know that everyone is at risk for contracting the H1N1 influenza virus and should take steps to protect themselves and others.

### **Where to Stay Informed**

[www.pike-health.org](http://www.pike-health.org)    [www.cdc.gov/h1n1](http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1)    [www.flu.gov](http://www.flu.gov)

Please be aware that local information will also be disseminated in the local newspaper and radio stations. You can contact the Pike County General Health District @ 947-7721

*Information Provided Here is Based on Current CDC Recommendations as of October 13, 2009*

## Special Considerations for Faith-Based Communities

Many faith-based and community groups hold services or meetings that bring people together. If the flu is causing more severe disease, the Pike County General Health District with consultation from the CDC may suggest that people avoid close contact with others and avoid attending large gatherings, a practice often called social distancing. These measures are intended to slow the spread of flu. Religious traditions and obligations may make it difficult to implement social distancing measures. However, faith-based can do some specific things to help keep their members healthy.

### What steps can leaders of religious services take if there is an outbreak of flu in my community?

- To the extent possible, make decisions in accordance with your state and local health departments about community gatherings and religious services during widespread flu illness in your community. People should not be discouraged from gathering unless advised by public health officials.
- Encourage people to wash hands often with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub. If soap and water are not available and alcohol-based products are not allowed, other hand sanitizers that do not contain alcohol may be useful.
- Remind people to cover their mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. It may prevent those around them from getting sick.
- Reduce crowding as much as possible.
- Identify which activities may increase the chance of spreading flu. Work with your local health department to make decisions about changing or limiting these activities in order to help keep people healthy.
- People gathering in close proximity may increase the risk of flu transmission.
- Many religious services and community meetings involve a time of greeting or recognition by shaking hands or hugging. Encouraging interaction without physical contact and implementing social distancing measures may reduce the spread of flu in your community.
- Some religious traditions and rituals emphasize eating and drinking from communal dishes and vessels. Flu transmission may be possible in these circumstances. If flu is circulating widely in your community, faith-based leaders may consider adjusting such practices in order to reduce the spread of flu. Check with the Pike County General Health District for more information.

*Please take time to review the document*

**H1N1 Flu: A Guide for Community and Faith-Based Organizations** *produced by the Center for Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services with support from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.*

For More Information Contact:

**Pike County General Health District @ [www.pike-health.org](http://www.pike-health.org) or (740)947-7721**