



# STATE OF NEW YORK DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Corning Tower The Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller Empire State Plaza Albany, New York 12237

Richard F. Daines, M.D.  
Commissioner

James W. Clyne, Jr.  
Executive Deputy Commissioner

September, 2009

Dear Colleague,

The New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) is taking many important steps to prepare for this year's flu season, especially given concerns about novel Influenza A (novel H1N1) virus, formerly referred to as swine flu. This letter is written to clinical and support services providers who work with people living with HIV/AIDS. In the coming weeks and months, it is likely that your patients and clients living with HIV will ask questions about seasonal flu and novel H1N1 flu. To find the latest information about seasonal flu and novel H1N1 flu, health care providers and the public can visit the DOH website <http://www.health.state.ny.us/diseases/communicable/influenza/h1n1/> or the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene website at: <http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/flu/flu.shtml>.

The NYSDOH AIDS Institute supports the Center for Disease Control's *Interim Guidance – HIV Infected Adults and Adolescents: Considerations for Clinicians Regarding Novel Influenza A (H1N1) Virus*. To access these guidelines visit [http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/guidance\\_HIV.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/guidance_HIV.htm). When reviewing the guidance, please be sure to explore any updated links that are embedded in the document in order to learn the latest developments. For example, the following link within the guidance offers updated information about chemoprophylaxis and treatment: <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/recommendations.htm>.

People living with HIV/AIDS are a priority population to receive both the seasonal influenza vaccine and the novel H1N1 vaccine. It is important for clinical and support services providers to encourage all individuals with HIV to take advantage of these important vaccines to protect their health. It is anticipated that vaccine for novel H1N1 flu will be available in mid-October. Department of Health has sent a letter to health care settings with information about how to [pre-register to obtain the novel H1N1 vaccine](#) for administration to their adult patients. The AIDS Institute would like to take this opportunity to urge HIV care settings to be prepared to offer the novel H1N1 vaccine to their patients.

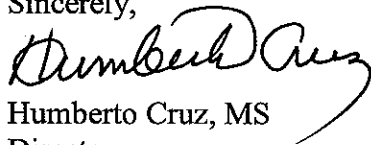
People with HIV who develop symptoms of the flu should call their health care provider for guidance. A visit to the doctor or emergency room is usually not necessary. It is important to note that laboratory testing is not routinely recommended for persons with suspected novel H1N1 infection. Depending on the clinical test used, influenza testing may not be sensitive or timely enough to assist with initial patient management decisions. At this time, laboratory screening for novel H1N1 should be considered for individuals who are hospitalized or are experiencing severe symptoms. Clinicians treating people with HIV who are suspected of having novel H1N1 flu should use their clinical judgment when deciding whether to perform laboratory testing for novel H1N1 infection. Clinicians can access an HIV specialist to discuss case-based HIV clinical care by calling 1-866-637-2342.

Below are a set of key messages that clinical and support services providers should make every effort to share with people living with HIV/AIDS:

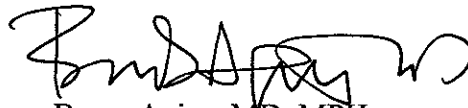
1. Adults and adolescents living with HIV should take advantage of the seasonal influenza vaccine as soon as possible and the novel H1N1 vaccine when it becomes available. People living with HIV/AIDS are considered a priority population for both vaccinations.
2. All adults, adolescents and children should take common sense steps to avoid the flu. These include: avoiding close contact with people who have flu-like symptoms; staying home when you are sick; washing hands frequently; and using a tissue to cover the mouth when coughing or sneezing.
3. The symptoms of novel H1N1 flu are similar to those of the seasonal flu and include fever, cough, sore throat, headache, chills and fatigue. People with HIV who develop symptoms of the flu should call their health care provider for guidance. A visit to the doctor or emergency room is usually not necessary.
4. Medication is available to treat novel H1N1 if a person becomes infected. People with HIV/AIDS can take these medications as they will not interfere with HIV antiretroviral treatment.

To assist you in educating people with HIV/AIDS about novel H1N1 flu, please find the attached consumer education fact sheet. The NYSDOH AIDS Institute will provide updates as information evolves in the coming weeks and months. Your efforts to address novel H1N1 and seasonal flu are greatly appreciated and are an important service to promote well-being among people living with HIV/AIDS.

Sincerely,



Humberto Cruz, MS  
Director  
AIDS Institute



Bruce Agins, MD, MPH  
Medical Director  
AIDS Institute

Attachments

If you have HIV/AIDS, you may be wondering if you are at risk of serious illness from novel H1N1 influenza (Swine Flu). In the past, people with HIV/AIDS have not seemed more likely to get seasonal flu than other people. However, HIV-infected people, and especially persons with low CD4 cell counts or AIDS, can have more severe complications from seasonal flu. It is possible that HIV-infected people could also have more serious complications from infection with novel H1N1 flu.

### For the best protection – get vaccinated

Those with HIV/AIDS will be among the first people able to get the H1N1 flu vaccine. Talk to your doctor about getting this new vaccine just as soon as it is available. Also, be sure to get vaccinated against seasonal flu. Seasonal flu can cause severe complications for people with HIV/AIDS.

### Take these everyday steps

There are many things you, your family and friends can do to help prevent the spread of germs and reduce the chances of getting seasonal flu and novel H1N1 flu.

- Wash your hands often with soap and warm water – or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water aren't available.
- Cough or sneeze into a tissue (or the crook of your elbow).
- Try not to touch your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people and stay home when you are sick.

### Stay Healthy

Eat right, get enough sleep, and reduce stress as much as possible. Staying healthy reduces your risk of getting the flu and other infections, and helps your immune system fight off the flu if you do get it.

If you are currently taking antiretrovirals or treatment to prevent opportunistic infections, be sure to continue your prescribed treatment and follow the advice of your health care provider to keep your immune system as healthy as possible.

If you have a household member or close contact with someone who has the flu or flu-like symptoms check with your health care provider to see if you should take antiviral medications to prevent the flu.

### Watch for flu symptoms

Symptoms of the new H1N1 flu are like those of seasonal flu, and include: fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headaches, chills and fatigue, and sometimes diarrhea and vomiting. If you think you may have the new H1N1 flu, do the same as you would for routine seasonal flu – contact your doctor right away for guidance. Your doctor will decide if testing or treatment is needed.

For more information, go to [www.nyhealth.gov](http://www.nyhealth.gov) and [www.flu.gov](http://www.flu.gov).  
Check with your doctor if you have specific questions or concerns