

## Novel H1N1 Flu (Swine Flu) and Feeding your Baby: What Parents Should Know

**Symptoms for H1N1 are similar to seasonal influenza: fever, cough, runny nose, headache, sore throat, muscle aches, vomiting, and diarrhea. Most cases of H1N1 are uncomplicated and mild. They do not require hospitalization. It is safe to eat cooked pork.**

**What is this new flu virus?** This novel H1N1 flu virus was detected in the US in April 2009. This virus spreads from person-to-person, probably in much the same way that regular seasonal influenza viruses spread.



**What can I do to protect my baby?** Take everyday precautions such as washing your hands with plain soap and water or using an alcohol-based hand rub before feeding your baby. More tips on preventing sickness from the flu virus can be found at this website: [cdc.gov/flu/protect/habits.htm](http://cdc.gov/flu/protect/habits.htm). Also, try not to cough or sneeze in the baby's face while feeding your baby, or any other time you and your baby are close. If possible, only family members who are not sick should care for infants. If you are sick and there is no one else to care for your baby, wear a facemask, if available and tolerable, and cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing.

**Is it ok for me to feed my baby if I am sick?** Infants are thought to be at higher risk for severe illness from novel influenza A (H1N1) infection and very little is known about prevention of novel H1N1 flu infection in infants. If you are breastfeeding or giving your baby infant formula, a cautious approach is to protect your baby from exposure to the flu virus in the following ways:

- Ask for help from someone who is not sick to feed and care for your baby, if possible.
- If there is no one else who can take care of your baby while you are sick, try to wear a face mask at all times when you are feeding or caring for your baby. Be very careful about washing your hands and taking everyday precautions to prevent your baby from getting flu [cdc.gov/flu/protect/habits.htm](http://cdc.gov/flu/protect/habits.htm). Using a cloth blanket between you and your baby during feedings might also help.

If you are breastfeeding, someone who is not sick can give your baby your expressed milk. Ideally babies less than about 6 months of age should get their feedings from breast milk. It is OK to take medicines to treat the flu while you are breastfeeding.

**Does breastfeeding protect babies from this new flu virus?** There are many ways that breastfeeding and breast milk protect babies' health. Flu can be very serious in young babies. Babies who are not breastfed get sick from infections like the flu more often and more severely than babies who are breastfed. Since this is a new virus, we don't know yet about specific protection against it. Mothers pass on protective antibodies to their baby during breastfeeding. Antibodies are made by the immune system which help fight off infection. If you are sick with flu and are breastfeeding, someone who is not sick can give your baby your expressed milk.

**Should I stop breastfeeding my baby if I think I have come in contact with the flu?** No. Because mothers make antibodies to fight diseases they come in contact with, their milk is custom-made to fight the diseases their babies are exposed to as well. This is really important in young babies when their immune system is still developing. It is OK to take medicines to prevent the flu while you are breastfeeding. Make sure you wash your hands often and take everyday precautions [cdc.gov/flu/protect/habits.htm](http://cdc.gov/flu/protect/habits.htm). If you develop symptoms of the flu such as fever, cough, or sore throat, you should ask someone who is not sick to care for your baby. If you become sick, someone who is not sick can give your baby your expressed milk by eye-dropper, spoon, feeding syringe or cup.

**Is it okay to take medicine to treat or prevent novel H1N1 flu while breastfeeding?** Yes. Mothers who are breastfeeding and taking medicine to treat flu because they are sick should express their breast milk for feeding their baby, which can be given to your baby by someone who isn't sick. Breastfeeding moms who are taking medicines to prevent the flu because they have been exposed to the virus should continue to feed their baby at the breast as long as they do not have symptoms of the flu such as fever, cough, or sore throat.

**If my baby is sick, is it okay to breastfeed?** Yes. One of the best things you can do for your sick baby is keep breastfeeding.

- Do not stop breastfeeding if your baby is sick. Give your baby many chances to breastfeed throughout the illness. Babies who are sick need more fluids than when they are well. The fluid babies get from breast milk is better than anything else, even better than water, juice, or Pedialyte® because it also helps protect your baby's immune system.
- If your baby is too sick to breastfeed, he or she can drink your milk from a cup, bottle, syringe, or eye-dropper.



## Pregnant Women

- Should decrease risk of exposure to the virus, by washing hands frequently, avoiding crowds, avoiding people who are ill
- Avoid complications, for both yourself and your baby by seeking treatment as soon as possible, since pregnant women are at the greatest risk for serious problems.
- Your baby can be distressed if you get the flu and fever late in pregnancy. **YOU SHOULD BE TREATED.**



- Should seek treatment as soon as you feel ill (within 48 hours is best) but late treatment is better than no treatment.

Any risk to the fetus is outweighed by the benefits of treating the mother.

## Mother sick at delivery

- Use a mask when near baby
  - Take recommended medication.
- May need to separate non-breastfeeding mom and infant. This is another reason moms should breastfeed.



## Infants

- Infants not breastfed are at increased risk for H1N1 if exposed.
- Breastfeeding is best for baby, as exclusive breastfeeding (no added foods or formula) is protective
- If feeding both breastmilk and formula, try to increase breastfeeding
- Mothers who have discontinued breastfeeding can “relactate” with the help of a certified lactation consultant. Currently recommended anti-viral medications can be taken while breastfeeding.
- If infant is sick and can't suckle, expressed mother's milk should be fed to infant by feeding syringe, spoon, eye-dropper or cup.
- To prevent the spread of germs, wash hands, keep mom and baby together, clean pacifiers and shared toys

## Children

- Children are susceptible to viral infection.
  - The flu is more serious in children under 5 years old and in children with chronic medical conditions.
  - Seek treatment if your child is seriously sick or has a chronic medical condition.
- Do not give aspirin or aspirin-containing meds to children

## Child Care Issues

- Sick children and workers should stay at home.
- Sick children should be sent home to avoid exposure to children and staff.