

H1N1 and Seasonal Flu Treatment

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What Do I Have, H1N1 or Season Flu?

Most patients will not really know whether they had seasonal flu or they had H1N1 because basically both will have very similar flu symptoms. And for the majority of people who are not very sick, they may never be tested.

What If I am Exposed to H1N1?

For the average person who believes they may have been exposed to H1N1, they should probably just watch themselves for symptoms. However, if they themselves have risk factors that could put them at risk for either severe disease or complications, they should really contact their provider because there may be a role for antivirals to try to prevent them actually getting the illness.

Treatments: Seasonal Flu vs. H1N1

Really, there won't be much of a difference between what would be done for seasonal flu and what would be done for H1. It's really staying at home, resting, taking fluids. Particularly if you're sick, not going to school or work, not going to congregate settings. Really, not so much for you, but so that you don't transmit it to other people who might be vulnerable.

In terms of people who are more severely ill or have risk factors, the differences might be that the seasonal flu this year happens to be resistant to the Tamiflu antiviral medication. And so, for H1N1 that is one of the treatments that's being offered. For seasonal flu, Tamiflu probably won't work.

Secondary Complications

Looking back at other epidemics of flu, such as the 1918 pandemic, it looks like it's not just the flu that may have added to either the morbidity or mortality of the patients, it looks like that it's secondary complications that the patients also developed, such as pneumonias or bacterial blood stream

infections. And for those patients who come into the hospital who are severely ill, in addition to the antivirals and the supportive care, there may also be antibacterial treatment for such pneumonias or bacteremias.

I've Had Flu Before. Am I Protected?

I think if someone has an influenza-like illness, as with any flu virus, there may be mutation over time, probably in the short run they do have immunity from that particular strain. But over the long run, they probably will be at risk over time for other flu-like syndromes.

Putting Things in Perspective

One of the most important things is really just to put this in perspective. The real concern was that [H1N1] might be tremendously more virulent than seasonal flu and so far that hasn't really borne out. Nobody really has a crystal ball. We're hoping that that's not true. But what health departments and the public health system and hospitals, clinicians are really trying to do is put things in place [in case] we were to have a more serious situation. We're really planning for the worst case scenario hoping that we never have to use it.

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