

H1N1 Testing & Treatment

I'm worried I might have H1N1 (swine flu) and I want to be tested. Are there tests for the virus?

Testing for H1N1 (swine flu) is done in one of two ways:

- RT-PCR which is highly exact but not very rapid.
- RIDT which is rapid but not very exact.

The **RT-PCR test** is highly reliable in detecting the H1N1. But, the test is very expensive and the specimen must be sent off to a reference lab for confirmation. It can take five days or more for the results to come back. This test is not useful in an outpatient clinic or practice where the answer is needed in a couple of hours.

The **rapid test, RIDT**, can be done in under an hour, but is not very accurate. There is only a 50 percent chance that the test will detect the H1N1 virus. This means that many people with the virus will not be confirmed using this test. And, when the seasonal flu returns this winter, it too will be detected by the RIDT. This may cause confusion for the healthcare provider as the two viruses are different strains of the flu and may be treated differently due to differing Tamiflu resistance.

Overall, it is more important that your healthcare provider do a complete evaluation of you, your symptoms and your physical condition. Testing is not needed to treat you if your healthcare provider believes that you have the flu.

If I am sick with flu symptoms but the rapid test is negative, what will happen?

A negative test does not mean that you don't have the flu. The test is just not very accurate. Your healthcare provider will base care decisions on all the factors associated with you such as your age, general medical condition, symptoms, fever and other physical findings. This is the information that will help your healthcare provider make decisions about next steps in your care.

My test is positive; will I need to get it rechecked?

No. As you improve and get better, your body will clear the virus and you will no longer test positive.

What is Tamiflu? I've heard that you can take Tamiflu to treat flu symptoms.

Tamiflu is an antiviral medication used to treat influenza like the H1N1. It does not treat bacteria and it does not treat other viruses such as the common cold. It has been shown to have a positive effect in severely ill, hospitalized patient and in outpatients treated within 48 hours of the onset of the illness.

It is generally used to treat patients who have risk factors for severe disease such as children who are under the age of five, older individuals with chronic medical conditions and pregnant women.

Do all people with the flu need treatment?

No. Most people with the flu never seek medical care or advice; they simply rest, take medicine such as Tylenol to control their fever and drink plenty of fluids. Once you are well 24 hours without fever or other symptoms, it is safe to return to work or school.

My child was diagnosed with H1N1 but my doctor did not prescribe Tamiflu. Why?

Your child's symptoms may have started more than 48 hours prior to being seen by the doctor. Tamiflu does not work well after this time. Your child may have a mild case or may be a generally healthy child over the age of five who is not in a high-risk group. In older healthy children (ages 6 to 18), about 51 percent who take Tamiflu also have negative side effects such as headaches, stomach aches, confusion or strange behavior.

Will my doctor prescribe Tamiflu just in case?

No. this would be a dangerous practice for two reasons. First, Tamiflu has side effects which could be serious. Giving (and taking) the medicine "just in case" could cause more harm than good. Second, you do not know if you or your child has the flu. Taking a medicine for suspicion of the flu without a doctor's evaluation may miss a more serious infection such as meningitis, or may be used for a virus that is not affected by Tamiflu such as the common cold.

Will I get Tamiflu if I am exposed to someone with the flu?

This would be determined by your healthcare provider based on whether or not you are at high risk for severe flu. In general, an isolated exposure has less than a 10-15 percent chance of transmitting the flu.