

H1N1 (Swine) Flu – Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

This document was prepared by the Health & Safety Office of the Uniformed Firefighters Association (UFA) in conjunction with the FDNY Bureau of Health Services. Particular appreciation to Dr. Kerry Kelly, M.D. for her assistance.

1. What makes the H1N1 flu different from other yearly flu seasons?
Each season there are predominant flu strains that literally circle the world. Most times the strain varies slightly from year to year. The most vulnerable groups are always the very young and very old and those with underlying health problems. This spring, the H1N1 flu arrived. This strain has affected children and young adults, more so than the elderly. Pregnant women have also been a group that has been vulnerable to this illness, with increased complications including hospitalizations and death. Each year, 36,000 people die due to the flu. We do not have the totals so far for this season.
2. Why is this referred to as a Pandemic, and what does that mean?
Pandemic is a term used by the World Health Organization when an infection affects people in so many countries.
3. What is the proper PPE to wear on CFR runs?
N95 and gloves remain the best protection on all CFR runs, and do not send the whole company, only two members: officer and one member.
4. Is the vaccine safe and what are the expected side effects?
Every year, the manufacturers produce the yearly flu shot incorporating the three strains that are predominant at that time. It is a guesstimate of which strains will be affecting our country in the fall and winter months. This year the H1N1 flu struck in the spring, so it was not included in the seasonal flu vaccine. So the same manufacturers, using the same technique have produced this H1N1 vaccine. The vaccine was tested. It is safe. The side effects are the same for each year's flu shot. The injection is not a live vaccine (the nasal version is live). It cannot give you the flu. It can give you a sore arm, some muscle aches, but no different than the usual flu shot.
5. There are media reports about the vaccine being new and untested. Is there any truth to this?
The manufacturing is the same as is used for the seasonal flu. There are no new ingredients, no different technology.
6. Should you take the vaccine if you have ongoing health issues (i.e. sinus problems, GERD, sore throat, etc.)?
The vaccine should be taken by those with underlying medical problems. This is the group that is most vulnerable to getting the flu and getting the complications from the flu. Do not take the vaccine if you have a fever or an acute infection. Wait and get it when you are better.
7. How long after I take the vaccine do you believe I would be properly protected?
In a group just studied in Australia, those who received the H1N1 vaccine had circulating antibodies (ready to fight the infection) in 8 to 10 days.

8. How do I find out if I have the H1N1 flu?
For more information about the flu go to the CDC, NYC Department of Health and/or the IAFF website.
- Centers for Disease Control (CDC):
 - <http://www.cdc.gov/H1N1flu/qa.htm>
 - NYC Department of Health (NYC DOH):
 - http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/downloads/pdf/cd/h1n1_flu_basic_faq.pdf
 - International Association of Firefighters (IAFF):
 - <http://www.iaff.org/hs/Resi/Pan%20Flu%20Final.asp>
9. If I get this flu, what should I do?
If you are sick with the flu, do not go to work, and do not come down to BHS with a fever. Call the medical office; we can offer meds and we can bring you to clinic once the fever is gone.
10. If I get this flu, how long is it expected to last?
The flu usually lasts 3 to 7 days.
11. My wife is pregnant and reports say she is more at risk, what can I do to protect her and my family?
The best way to protect your family, your loved ones and your company is to get the flu shot. It remains the best tool to prevent illness.
12. When will the Bureau of Health Services be offering the H1N1 vaccine and how do I get it? Will it still be offered to me if I am on light duty?
BHS will start to offer H1N1 once we get it from DOH. It will be given out thru BIOPOD this year a four day event to ensure that all members (full duty and light duty) are offered this important vaccine. After this we will offer it at annuals, and in the medical office.
13. Is the N95 the right protection when dealing with CFR runs?
N95 masks protect against infections such as the flu.
14. What happens if our company does not have enough N95 respirators?
Every company should have N95 masks to protect themselves.
15. What medication is most effective against the H1N1 flu?
If you are starting with flu symptom, medications can be offered including TAMIFLU, this medication if given within the first 24 to 48 hours can shorten the course of illness and lessen the symptoms.
16. If I get sick from the H1N1 flu, is it considered Line-of-Duty?
Each case will be evaluated individually. This is a widespread illness. Means of transmissions are not always clear. But the flu vaccine remains an important part of protecting yourself and others.
17. How long is the flu season expected to last?
The flu season typically lasts thru the winter months into early spring.
18. What is Biopod all about and why should I take a shot when it is offered?
Biopod provides a mechanism to offer the H1N1 VACCINE to our members. We expect to offer it to all our members. Biopod is part of our bio preparedness program and I repeat that the flu shot remains the best tool to prevent illness!
19. In addition to the Flu Vaccine, how else can I protect myself and others against the flu?
- Cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze, using a sleeve or a tissue (not a bare hand).
 - **WASH YOUR HANDS OFTEN** with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Or use an alcohol-based hand cleaner.
 - Don't get too close to people who are sick. If you get sick yourself, avoid close contact with other people.