

H1N1 Flu Virus Precautions in Labor & Delivery

Novel H1N1 (“swine flu”) is a new influenza virus making many people sick. This new virus was first detected in people in the United States in April 2009. This virus is spreading from person to person worldwide, probably in much the same way that regular seasonal influenza viruses spread.

While many infections with the H1N1 virus are mild, some people infected with this virus have become very sick or have died. ***More than half of the people requiring hospitalization have been pregnant or also had other medical conditions.*** Newborns are at increased risk for serious complications with influenza. Because very little is known about preventing H1N1 flu infection in infants, the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) has issued the following recommendations to decrease the risk of exposure to babies at delivery, and after, when the mother may have H1N1 influenza:

- Antiviral medicine should be given to the mother as soon as possible.
- Mothers should wear a mask during labor and delivery if tolerable in order to decrease the risk of exposure to the newborn.
- Healthcare workers will wear a gown, gloves and a mask while caring for the mother. These are called “transmission-based precautions.”

The mother should consider avoiding close contact with her infant until she has taken antiviral medication for 48 hours, her fever has fully resolved, and she can control her cough and secretions.

- The infant should be cared for in a separate room by another person who is well.
- Because breastfeeding is so important, mothers should be encouraged and assisted to express their milk. While mother and baby are separated, the baby should be fed by another person who is well.
- As soon as the mother has been treated with antiviral medication for 48 hours, her fever has fully resolved and she can control her cough, the mother is encouraged to breastfeed frequently, but wear a mask, change to a clean gown, and wash her hands before each interaction with her infant.
- These measures should be continued for at least 7 days after flu symptoms started.
- Because it is not known if mothers transmit the virus to their fetus prior to birth, newborns whose mothers are ill will be separated from other babies in the nursery.

Mothers may choose not to follow the above recommendations and keep their babies with them in the room. In this situation, the following precautions will be used:

- The infant will stay in the mother’s room for her entire stay and will not return to the nursery.
- The mother will be asked to clean her hands with soap and water or hand sanitizer before touching or holding her baby.
- The mother will be encouraged to wear a clean gown over other clothing and to wear a mask when holding or feeding the baby.
- It will be recommended that the baby remain in the crib as much as possible and that the crib be placed at least three feet away from the mother when the baby is not being fed.

These precautions are being used to help protect the newborns from infection. Also, family members and friends should not visit if they are sick or have had recent exposure to a sick person. Family and friends should also be encouraged to get vaccinated for both seasonal influenza and H1N1 influenza.



If you have questions or would like more information, please call your doctor.

References: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Considerations Regarding Novel H1N1 Flu Virus in Obstetric Setting.* July 2009. www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/guidance/obstetric.htm