

# Questions on 2009 H1N1 Flu Virus and Food

## **Q: Can people get 2009 H1N1 flu virus by eating food products?**

Influenza viruses are not known to be spread by eating food items.

## **Q: How is influenza transmitted?**

Influenza viruses are spread through inhalation or through touching contaminated surfaces and then touching the mouth, nose, or eyes.

## **Q: Could a sick restaurant worker transmit H1N1 flu virus to consumers in a restaurant or other food-service venue?**

Transmission of the virus in a restaurant could occur through the normal routes of infection that could happen in any public or private setting—inhalation of the virus expelled by infected individuals when coughing or sneezing, and, by touching any surface that is contaminated with the virus and then touching the mouth, nose or eyes.

Influenza is not known to be spread through consumption of a food item. However, in accordance with long-standing FDA recommendations, food workers experiencing symptoms of respiratory illness should not work with exposed food, clean equipment, utensils, linens or unwrapped single-service or single-use articles.

In addition, the U.S Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that individuals experiencing symptoms of 2009 H1N1 flu virus stay home from work.

## **Q: Should individuals or restaurants alter cooking methods to decrease the risk of H1N1 flu virus?**

It is not necessary to alter cooking times or temperatures for any food products in order to reduce chances of contracting 2009 H1N1 flu virus, because eating food is not a known method of transmission of influenza viruses.

## **Q: What can an employee do to reduce the chances of contracting H1N1 flu virus?**

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, two important ways to reduce the chance of contracting 2009 H1N1 flu virus are appropriate hand washing and avoidance of touching the mouth, nose, or eyes.

Washing your hands often will help protect you from germs. Wash with soap and water or clean with alcohol-based hand cleaner. The Food and Drug Administration recommends that when you wash your hands -- with soap and warm water -- that you wash for up to 20 seconds. When soap and water are not available, alcohol-based disposable hand wipes or gel sanitizers may be used. You can find them in most supermarkets and drugstores. If using gel, rub your hands until the gel is dry. The gel doesn't need water to work; the alcohol in it kills the germs on your hands.

## **Q. What precautions can I take as a restaurant operator?**

- **Maintain a healthy work environment.** Ensure adequate air circulation, and post tips on how to stop the spread of germs.
- **Remind employees that their health and safety,** as well as that of our customers, is our number-one priority.
- **Communicate openly and proactively with your employees.** Remind employees that following good hygiene and sanitation practices in the restaurant and staying home when they are ill can help prevent transmission of many illnesses, not just influenza.

- **Repeat the basic steps of proper hygiene:** Promote hand and respiratory hygiene for your employees, and ensure easy availability of soap and water and alcohol-based hand sanitizers
  - Wash hands often.
  - Cover mouth and nose when you sneeze or cough.
  - Avoid touching your mouth, nose or eyes.
- **Inform employees of the symptoms of H1N flu virus:**
  - Fever
  - Headaches
  - Cough
  - Chills
  - Sore throat
  - Fatigue
  - Body aches
  - Possible diarrhea and vomiting.
- **Suggest that if employees experience symptoms** they believe are connected with the flu, they should see a health care provider who can direct appropriate action.
- **Be sure to have this information accessible** and easily visible to all employees.
- **Coordinate with your local health department** on any actions that are being taken in your local community such as need for isolation and closing. Keep in close contact to be sure you are advised of any change in local status.

**Q. How long does influenza virus survive on surfaces in my restaurant?**

The H1N1 virus is new. Research is being conducted to better understand its characteristics. Studies have shown that flu viruses can survive on hard surfaces and can infect a person for up to 2 to 8 hours after being left on items like cafeteria tables, doorknobs, and desks.

**Q. What is the best way to clean and disinfectant hard surfaces in my restaurant?**

The EPA has stated that disinfectants registered as effective against influenza A will be effective against the 2009 H1N1 flu strain. Follow these tips when disinfecting hard surfaces in your restaurant:

- Remove organic material from surface to be disinfected and follow normal cleaning procedures.
- Rinse off detergents to avoid diluting or inactivating the disinfectant.
- Carefully read and follow directions for use on the product label.
- For disinfection of food contact surfaces, follow disinfection with a potable water rinse and then a hard surface EPA registered sanitizer according to label directions.
- Wear disposable gloves while cleaning and disinfecting. Discard gloves after use and wash and/or sanitize hands before and after gloving.



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