What is the swine flu? What is the bird flu?

Currently, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports many confirmed human cases of swine Influenza A (H1N1) in the United States. The spread of the swine flu is reported to be happening in the same way that seasonal flu spreads. Flu viruses are spread mainly through coughing or sneezing among people with influenza. Sometimes people may become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose.

Swine flu is a respiratory disease in pigs caused by the type A influenza virus (H1N1) that causes regular outbreaks in pigs. It is one type of swine flu virus among several strains. The "influenza pandemic," the swine flu H1N1, and the avian flu H5N1 (also called "bird flu") are not the same thing. The H5N1 virus is one type of avian flu virus. While it meets the test of novelty, it hasn't yet developed the ability to spread well among humans (and may never). If the current bird flu evolves to spread efficiently from person to person, it could well become a pandemic.

We hear much about it because public health authorities are concerned about this H5N1 avian flu, which currently is very rare among humans. In the past, avian influenza viruses such as H5N1 have caused serious disease in poultry around the world (farmers and veterinarians used to call it "fowl plague"), but not in humans. The first known human cases of infection with H5N1 influenza were in Hong Kong in 1997. It is believed that the original patients caught the infection through close contact with live poultry. Visit the World Health Organization for more information about the bird flu.

Why is illness from the H1N1 outbreak categorized as "mild," given the recent upgrade of the pandemic alert to Phase 6 by the World Health Organization?

Public health authorities categorize the recent cases of swine Influenza A (H1N1) as 'mild' in the context of this outbreak as an appropriate descriptor of the impact of the disease; for example, the rate of hospitalizations and mortality compared to the impact observed in the past. This is distinct from the number of cases categorized in geographical regions around the world.

How is the University responding to the 2009 H1N1 outbreak?

The Pandemic Preparedness Working Group (PPWG) re-convened in spring 2009 when the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued the first alert.

Since then, the PPWG has directed the announcements and updates on this Preparedness website; the University has made hand sanitizer available in public areas such as customer service desks, dining halls and campus computing labs; signs encouraging handwashing and cough/sneeze etiquette have been posted around campus; and students, faculty, staff, and families have received emails with updates on the situation.

The PPWG and University leadership are working to make as much information available to the Columbia community as possible, while ensuring the contingency plans it has implemented remain appropriate to the needs of the community.
The University’s preparedness plan is consistent with the CDC's recommendation that postsecondary institutions of higher education take steps that will protect community members from the H1N1 flu. Columbia University has developed and implemented effective systems to help communicate up-to-date information in the event of a pandemic or other emergency to students, faculty, staff and families. For additional information, please see the Planning and Response section of this website.

If I am ill, what should I do?

If you become ill while you are at Columbia, please remember it is important for you to avoid attending classes, work and public activities until you are well again.

If you are a student, please contact Health Services at Columbia, 212-854-2284 and a nurse will be available to speak with you and provide advice on how to seek appropriate care. Faculty and staff are encouraged to be in touch with their personal healthcare providers.

If you are a Columbia student and you are too ill to attend classes, you should immediately contact your academic adviser to make alternate arrangements for missed coursework.

How long should I stay in my room or at home before going back to class or work?

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), it is recommended that a person with flu-like illness remain in their dorm room or at home until 24 hours after no longer experiencing fever (note that it is most accurate to check your temperature when you have not just taken fever-reducing medications, such as Tylenol or Motrin).

What are some on-campus resources available for ill students?

If you are a student experiencing flu-like illness, there are several plans and procedures in place at Columbia to take the best possible care of any student, such as providing facemasks and delivering meals to ill residential students.

A student on the Morningside campus should contact Health Services at 212-854-2284, available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. A nurse will be available to speak to you about seeking appropriate care, and also advise you when you are well enough to resume participation in normal academic activities.

At Columbia University Medical Center, students should contact the Student Health Service at 212-305-3400.

In addition, the Health Services staff can provide undergraduate students who live in residence halls and have a meal plan with a number to call in Housing and Dining Services to ask about other resources you might need while you are ill.

What can I do to protect myself?
The primary defense against influenza is immunization. Beginning in October, seasonal flu vaccine will be available on campus to all University students, faculty, and staff.

Several other protective measures are also important:

1. **Wash your hands often with soap and water**, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers are also effective.
2. **Cover your nose and mouth** with a tissue or the elbow of your arm when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
3. Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread that way.
4. **Clean things that are touched often** like door or refrigerator handles, computer keyboard/mouse, phone and water faucets.
5. **Avoid close contact with others who are ill.** Avoid holding, hugging or kissing anyone who has a cold or the flu.
6. **Do not take people at high risk for influenza into large crowds** during influenza season unless necessary.
7. **Stay home when you are ill.** Stay home when you are ill. If you have flu symptoms, stay home from work or school and avoid public activities until you are well (the current recommendation is 24 hours after you no longer have fever).
   - If you are feeling sick enough to need medical care, call your regular doctor or, if you are a student, the University Health Services.
   - Do not go to the emergency room unless it's necessary. In a bad flu year, flu patients can flood the hospital and also spread the infection to other people.
   - Keep an extra supply of non-perishable food, water and medications on hand, in case you have to stay inside for a while. This is a good general precaution for many other emergencies, such as severe weather or power outages.
8. **Those at risk for serious complication should receive a pneumococcal vaccination.** Secondary bacterial pneumonia is a common complication of influenza, a large proportion of which is due to the pneumococcus bacteria. It is likely to be the same with pandemic strains. Administering vaccine to people at risk for pneumococcal disease protects them now and during the next pandemic.
9. **Get an influenza shot annually.**
10. **Take precautions when traveling to areas affected by H1N1 or H5N1 influenza.** The CDC recommends that travelers at high risk for complications from any form of flu should discuss their travel plans with their doctor to carefully review the H1N1 flu situation in their destination and the available health-care options in the area. CDC does not currently recommend avoiding travel to countries affected by H1N1 or H5N1 influenza. However, it does recommend avoiding all direct contact with poultry (including touching well-appearing, sick or dead chickens and ducks). It also recommends avoiding places such as farms and markets where live animals are raised or kept, and avoiding the handling of surfaces contaminated with poultry or swine feces or secretions.

**What should I do if my roommate is ill?**
If your roommate has been evaluated by a health care professional at Health Services or elsewhere, they would have been instructed on how to minimize the risk of exposing you and others to the flu virus. Those instructions would include covering coughs and sneezes, staying in their room as much as possible, and wearing a mask when they need to be out of their room.

You can protect yourself by encouraging your roommate to closely follow these recommendations. Additionally, you should get adequate rest and nutrition, refrain from sharing kitchen utensils or drinking glasses and limit close contact with your roommate. If you feel that you may be getting sick, please call Health Services via the information at right.

**What should I do before coming to campus?**

For students arriving on campus, it is best to review and practice preventive measures to limit the spread of disease. You may also consider putting together a basic medical care kit to help with illness such as the flu. The kit may include a thermometer, tissues, hand sanitizer, soup packets, tea bags, salt for gargling, cough drops or throat lozenges and non-prescription fever-reducing medications (e.g., Tylenol or Motrin).

**Where can I get more information?**

- The Columbia University preparedness page included additional information on our planning and response measures, references to the CDC and Department of Health and additional FAQs. [http://www.columbia.edu/cu/studentservices/preparedness/index.html](http://www.columbia.edu/cu/studentservices/preparedness/index.html)
- This page is updated regularly. We encourage you to frequently check it and refer student and families to the site.