

Information from NSW Health

On advice from the Australian Government and in consultation with the other States and Territories, NSW moved to the new PROTECT Phase in June 2009. This move recognises that illness from the H1N1 influenza 09 virus is not as severe as originally described when the virus was first identified. The disease is mild in most cases, severe in some and moderate overall. The overwhelming majority of people who develop illness from the H1N1 influenza virus are making a rapid and full recovery.

The key aims of the PROTECT phase are to:

- identify people who may be at risk of more severe illness, in order to provide them with early treatment for influenza
- treat people with moderate or severe influenza-related illness
- control outbreaks in high-risk settings, such as special schools and residential care facilities.

To minimise the impact of an influenza pandemic on the health of the community the NSW Health Department recommends that the following measures be taken.

- Good hygiene practices should be observed. In particular, people who are sick should wash their hands regularly and practise good cough and sneeze etiquette.
- People who are sick will be strongly advised to stay at home until symptoms resolve.
- People who have moderate illness should see their GP immediately.
- People with severe illness should go to their nearest emergency department.

People who only develop mild illness and who are otherwise well will not require treatment with anti-influenza medicine. This treatment is only being given to those people who suffer from other conditions that may make them vulnerable to more serious illness.

At Risk Groups

NSW Health has now identified a range of people within the community that for one reason or another have an ailment or condition that will make them more susceptible to develop severe effects from both seasonal influenza and the H1N1 virus. People in this group are advised to seek medical advice promptly if any flu like symptoms develop.

This “at risk” group includes people who:

- are pregnant (particularly in the second and third trimester)
- have chronic lung disease (including asthma)
- are very obese
- have chronic heart conditions
- have chronic kidney disease
- have chronic liver disease
- have blood disorders (including sickle cell disease)
- have neurological disorders
- have metabolic disorders