



Tucson Interfaith HIV/AIDS Network
a compassionate interfaith response to HIV/AIDS

**PROTECTING YOURSELF AND OTHERS
DURING THE FLU SEASON:
A STATEMENT FOR TIHAN'S STAFF, VOLUNTEERS, AND CAREPARTNERS**

We are receiving questions regarding the seasonal flu and the H1N1 flu. We want to do everything we can to stop the spread of both kinds of flu virus within TIHAN and our staff, volunteers, and CarePartners. According to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), people with HIV/AIDS are considered at increased risk from serious influenza-related complications. Studies have shown an increased risk for heart and lung-related hospitalizations in people infected with HIV during influenza season. It is of critical importance that all of us learn about the flu and how we can minimize the possibility of getting the flu and spreading the flu.

The Pima County Health Department states that the spread of the H1N1 is largely the same as that of the seasonal flu. Flu viruses are primarily spread from person to person through coughing or sneezing by people who have the flu. Sometimes people may become infected by touching a surface or object with flu virus on it and then touching their mouth, eyes, or nose.

It is extremely important that, if you are experiencing any of the symptoms of the flu virus, you stay home until you fully recover. The symptoms of flu include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people may have vomiting and diarrhea. People may have the flu and have respiratory symptoms without a fever.

The Pima County Health Department published the following information regarding the flu:

Prevention & Treatment

What can I do to protect myself and others from getting sick?

There are everyday actions that help prevent the spread of germs that cause illnesses like the flu.

Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.

Wash your hands often with soap and warm water. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub with at least 60% alcohol concentration.

Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.

Try to avoid close contact with sick people (people who have flu-like symptoms).

What is the best way to wash my hands to avoid getting the flu?

Washing your hands often will help protect you from germs. You should wash your hands with soap and warm water for 15 to 20 seconds. When soap and water are not available, hand sanitizers may be used with at least 60% alcohol concentration. It is also important that if you feel like you might be getting sick, to stay home until you feel 100%.

What should I do if I get sick?

If you are sick with flu-like illness, it is recommended that you stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone without the use of a fever-reducing medicine. Keep away from others as much as possible to keep from spreading illness. Staying at home means that you should not leave your home except to seek medical care. This means avoiding normal activities including work, school, volunteering, travel, shopping, social events, and public gatherings. If you have severe illness or you are at high risk for flu complications, contact your health care provider or seek medical care. If you become ill and experience any of the following warning signs, seek emergency medical care.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is TIHAN doing to address the concerns about the flu?

We are ensuring that tissues and hand sanitizers are available at our offices and our events. We are encouraging our volunteers, staff, and CarePartners to frequently wash their hands, and to take other precautions to minimize the possibility of spreading the H1N1 or seasonal flu. Some staff/volunteers will also be responsible for ensuring that frequently-touched surfaces throughout the office and at work stations are cleaned regularly and with the cleaning supplies provided. Anyone who has the flu will be asked to stay home until 24 hours after their fever is gone.

Should TIHAN volunteers get the vaccine for the seasonal flu?

TIHAN strongly recommends that you discuss your vaccine options with your primary care physician. Your decision should be based on what you and your physician decide.

Should TIHAN volunteers get an H1N1 vaccine?

TIHAN strongly recommends that you discuss your vaccine options with your primary care physician. Your decision should be based on what you and your physician decide. We want to do whatever possible to protect our CarePartners from being exposed to the flu virus, and therefore encourage those who work directly with CarePartners to explore with your physician the possibility of being vaccinated.

What should I do if I am symptomatic after getting the vaccine?

If you are experiencing symptoms after being vaccinated, please stay home. TIHAN does not want to take any chances of exposing CarePartners or volunteers with the H1N1 or seasonal flu virus. Once your symptoms have subsided for 24 hours, you are safe to return to your volunteer commitments at TIHAN.

Should people living with HIV get a vaccine for the seasonal flu and/or H1N1 flu?

TIHAN strongly recommends that CarePartners living with HIV seek the advice of their physician. According to HIV specialist J. Kevin Carmichael, M.D., Associate Medical Director for Special Populations with El Rio Community Health Center, the standard of care for people living with HIV is that they should receive the shot rather than the nasal spray.

If a CarePartner gets the flu and needs help, what can TIHAN do?

TIHAN will refer the CarePartner to their primary care physician. We can provide the CarePartner with assistance in terms of a Care Package, but will instruct all volunteers to limit direct contact with the CarePartner who has the flu (in order to limit transmission), and will take proper precautions (i.e., washing hands, refraining from physical contact, etc.) while still dropping off any items that the CarePartner may request and being of support by phone.

If I am not feeling well but am not sure I have the flu, should I still stay home?

If you are not feeling well, you should absolutely stay home and refrain from your volunteer work. It is better to be safe than sorry, and if you're not feeling well we need to take all the precautions necessary to limit the transmission of all seasonal illnesses.

If you have questions or desire more information, visit www.flu.gov. Also, there is a good resource now available online: "H1N1 Flu: A Guide for Community and Faith-Based Organizations," (<http://www.flu.gov/professional/community/cfboguidance.pdf>) produced by the Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services with support from the CDC.