



# The Connection

## *Keeping Track of the Flu*

Flu season usually starts in fall and runs through winter; however, state Public Health Director Dr. Mel Kohn urges state employees to stay informed throughout the year.

“While we are relieved that the illness caused by the novel H1N1 virus appears to be no more severe than normal seasonal flu, influenza is a serious illness. Stay informed and take simple common-sense steps to keep yourself healthy and prevent the spread of flu.”

### **General Information**

- [www.flu.oregon.gov](http://www.flu.oregon.gov)
- [www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu](http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu)
- [www.cdc.gov/flu](http://www.cdc.gov/flu)

### **Communities**

- [Care facilities](#)
- [Schools and homes](#)
- [Workplace](#)

### **Vaccines**

PEBB is working with its medical plans to schedule flu vaccine clinics in worksites this fall. Vaccines will be those approved by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

## **It's Time to Get Ready for the Flu**

### **What is flu and how is it spread?**

Influenza – the flu – is a typically seasonal disease caused by a family of viruses named Orthomyxoviridae. H1N1 (swine flu) is a member of this family, as are seasonal influenza A and B.

Flu virus spreads by airborne droplets and contaminated surfaces. Most people don't even know when they've been exposed to this highly contagious illness unless they come down with symptoms.

### **Why should we pay attention to it?**

Each year, five to 20 percent of people worldwide will become ill with the flu. In the U.S., flu and its complications cause about 36,000 deaths and send 226,000 to the hospital each year.

Flu and complications also take a big toll in missed work and medical costs. They can lead to secondary illness such as pneumonia, sinus infections and ear infections. Influenza can also interfere with blood sugar control of people with diabetes.

### **Who is affected?**

Deaths and hospitalizations from flu and complications tend to occur in the frail – babies, elderly people and those with low immune systems or other health issues. But most times, young, healthy, unvaccinated children and adults spread flu virus. To complicate the issue, some healthy persons can be infected and contagious but have no symptoms.

### **How can we prevent it?**

Preventing a flu outbreak requires a two-pronged attack.

1. Stop transmission
2. Reduce susceptibility

Following are simple things you can do to cut transmission and steps you can take *now* to keep your defenses up.

## How to Spot it

H1N1 swine flu symptoms are similar to those for seasonal flu. They may include fever greater than 100 degrees F; sore throat; cough; stuffy nose; chills; headache or body aches; fatigue; and in some cases diarrhea and vomiting.

## What to do if you think you have it

If you or a family member has flu symptoms, your medical plan's nurse advice line is the first line of support. Each plan's member Web site includes the contact information (see "Resources" below). You'll need to give them your ID number from your plan's ID card.

## Resources

[oregon.gov/das/pebb](http://oregon.gov/das/pebb)  
[inquiries.pebb@state.or.us](mailto:inquiries.pebb@state.or.us)  
(503) 373-1102

### Medical Plans

[Kaiser Permanente](#)

[Providence Choice](#)

[Regence BCBSO](#)

[VSP](#) (Vision Service Plan)

### Mail-order Prescriptions

[PPS](#)

[Walgreens](#)

### Dental Plans

[Kaiser Permanente](#)

[ODS](#)

[Willamette Dental](#)

### Optional Plans

[The Standard](#)

[UnumProvident](#)

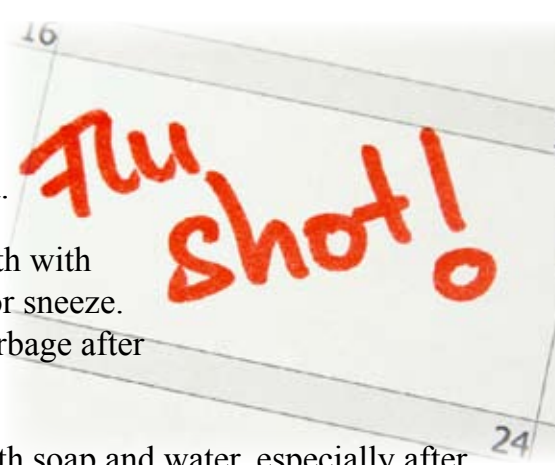
### Other Benefits

[FSA: ASIFlex](#)

[EAP: Cascade Centers](#)

# Stop Flu Transmission

- Get your annual flu shot when vaccine is available in the fall and winter.
- Urge your family, friends, co-workers and care providers to be vaccinated.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the garbage after you use it.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners also are effective.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth to avoid spreading germs.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- If you are ill, please stay home to avoid spreading your illness to others. Maintain a healthy lifestyle. Eat nutritious foods and get plenty of exercise and rest.



## Reduce Susceptibility

- If you smoke, stop now. All PEBB medical plans cover the [Quit for Life® program](#) through Free&Clear. Quit for Life includes phone counseling, nicotine replacement and recommendations on covered prescriptions to help you quit.
- Lose weight if you are overweight or obese. PEBB plans offer no-cost or reduced-rate participation in [Weight Watchers](#). Read how [your colleagues are succeeding](#) with this program.
- Talk with your provider about a plan to manage chronic conditions – asthma, diabetes or heart disease. Your medical plan covers prescriptions at low or no cost for these illnesses. See your plan's member handbook.

**[oregon.gov/das/pebb](http://oregon.gov/das/pebb)**