

FTC Consumer Alert

Federal Trade Commission ■ Bureau of Consumer Protection ■ Division of Consumer & Business Education

Rx for Products that Claim to Prevent H1N1?

A Healthy Dose of Skepticism

The daily news coverage about the spread of the H1N1 virus has raised public anxiety, and spawned many website and email promotions for products that claim to prevent, treat or cure the disease. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC), the nation's consumer protection agency, cautions consumers to be wary of all promotions related to H1N1 — also called swine flu.

Because much is still unknown about the specific virus thought to cause swine flu, the FTC says consumers should be skeptical of claims that products like pills, air filtration devices, and cleaning agents can kill or eliminate the virus. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), major consumer health agencies, say the best protection right now is to know the basic facts about the virus, practice good personal hygiene, and visit the CDC's website for travel information and guidance.

Federal health and legal authorities suggest that if and when consumers see advertisements touting prevention, treatment or cure claims for H1N1, they should ask themselves one key question: if a medical breakthrough involving the virus has occurred, would they be hearing about it for the first time through an advertisement or sales pitch?

Know The Facts

The CDC says that swine flu is contagious, and is thought to spread from person to person in the same way that seasonal flu spreads — mainly by cough or sneeze by people with the flu. Sometimes, people may become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose.

The symptoms of swine flu in people are similar to the symptoms of regular human flu and include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. A significant number of people who have been infected with this virus also have reported diarrhea and vomiting.

The CDC recommends the use of oseltamivir or zanamivir for the treatment and/or prevention of infection with this virus. Antiviral drugs are prescription medicines that fight against the flu by keeping flu viruses from reproducing in your body. If you get sick, these drugs can make your illness milder, make you feel better faster, and may prevent serious flu complications.

Keep Your Hands Clean

Public health authorities advise that basic personal hygiene is the best protection against infection. They add that the best way to protect against getting the flu is to wash your hands, get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage stress, drink plenty of fluids, and eat nutritious food. They also say that people should try not to touch surfaces that may be contaminated with the flu virus, and avoid contact

with people who are sick. When soap and water are not available, the health authorities suggest using alcohol-based disposable hand wipes or gel sanitizers. These products are available in most supermarkets and drugstores.

Check Travel Advisories for Affected Areas

To lower your risk of infection, the CDC suggests avoiding travel to those areas for which CDC has issued a travel advisory. The CDC's travel advisories are on their website, <http://wwwn.cdc.gov/travel/content/novel-h1n1-flu.aspx>.

Seek Medical Attention

If you think you may have influenza symptoms, or if you may have been in direct contact with someone with the flu, consult a health care professional immediately. Only qualified health care professionals should treat your symptoms.

Stay Informed

For more information from the federal government about the H1N1 flu, visit: the CDC at www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is recognized as the lead federal agency for protecting the health and safety of people at home and abroad, providing credible information to enhance health decisions, and promoting health through strong partnerships. The CDC serves as the national focus for developing and applying disease prevention and control, environmental health, and health promotion and education activities designed to improve the health of the people of the United States. Recognized for expertise in Infectious Diseases, the CDC, located in Atlanta, Georgia, USA, is an agency of the Department of Health and Human Services. General information can be accessed at our website, www.cdc.gov.

Federal Trade Commission

The FTC works for the consumer to prevent fraudulent, deceptive and unfair business practices in the marketplace and to provide information to help consumers spot, stop and avoid them. To file a complaint or to get free information on consumer issues, visit www.ftc.gov or call toll-free, 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357); TTY: 1-866-653-4261. The FTC enters Internet, telemarketing, identity theft and other fraud-related complaints into Consumer Sentinel, a secure, online database available to hundreds of civil and criminal law enforcement agencies in the U.S. and abroad.

| | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| FEDERAL TRADE COMMISSION | ftc.gov |
| 1-877-FTC-HELP | FOR THE CONSUMER |

May 2009