

Symptoms to consider when making your own preliminary diagnosis:

Influenza

Antiviral medications can help people feel better if taken within 48 hours of onset of symptoms

- Headache
- High fever
- Dry cough
- Chest pains
- Chills
- Severe fatigue
- Severe aches

NOTE: H1N1 virus also causes some gastrointestinal distress

Cold

Colds are caused by a different virus; symptoms are less severe — and they come on more gradually than flu

- Sneezing
- Stuffy nose
- Hacking cough
- Mild sore throat
- Mild fatigue

Strep throat

A sore throat, but no stuffy nose, may mean it's a streptococcal bacterial infection — antibiotics can help

- High fever
- Pus on tonsils
- Very sore throat

Stomach flu

Virus enters via mouth and multiplies in small intestine; symptoms can appear in a few hours, but usually take a day; food poisoning typically is a bacterial infection, such as E. coli

- Headache
- Vomiting
- Fatigue
- Diarrhea

FOLLOWING AN INFECTION

FLU TRAVELS

Flu viruses constantly mutate, making it tough for our immune defenses to recognize the virus and combat it. Since the current strain of the H1N1 virus (known as swine flu) is relatively new, it may be more contagious than seasonal flu, although it seems no more virulent and most cases should be resolved without significant medical intervention. Here is a look at how flu infections spread:

Health officials recommend most people get a flu shot — including for the H1N1 virus

Vaccination

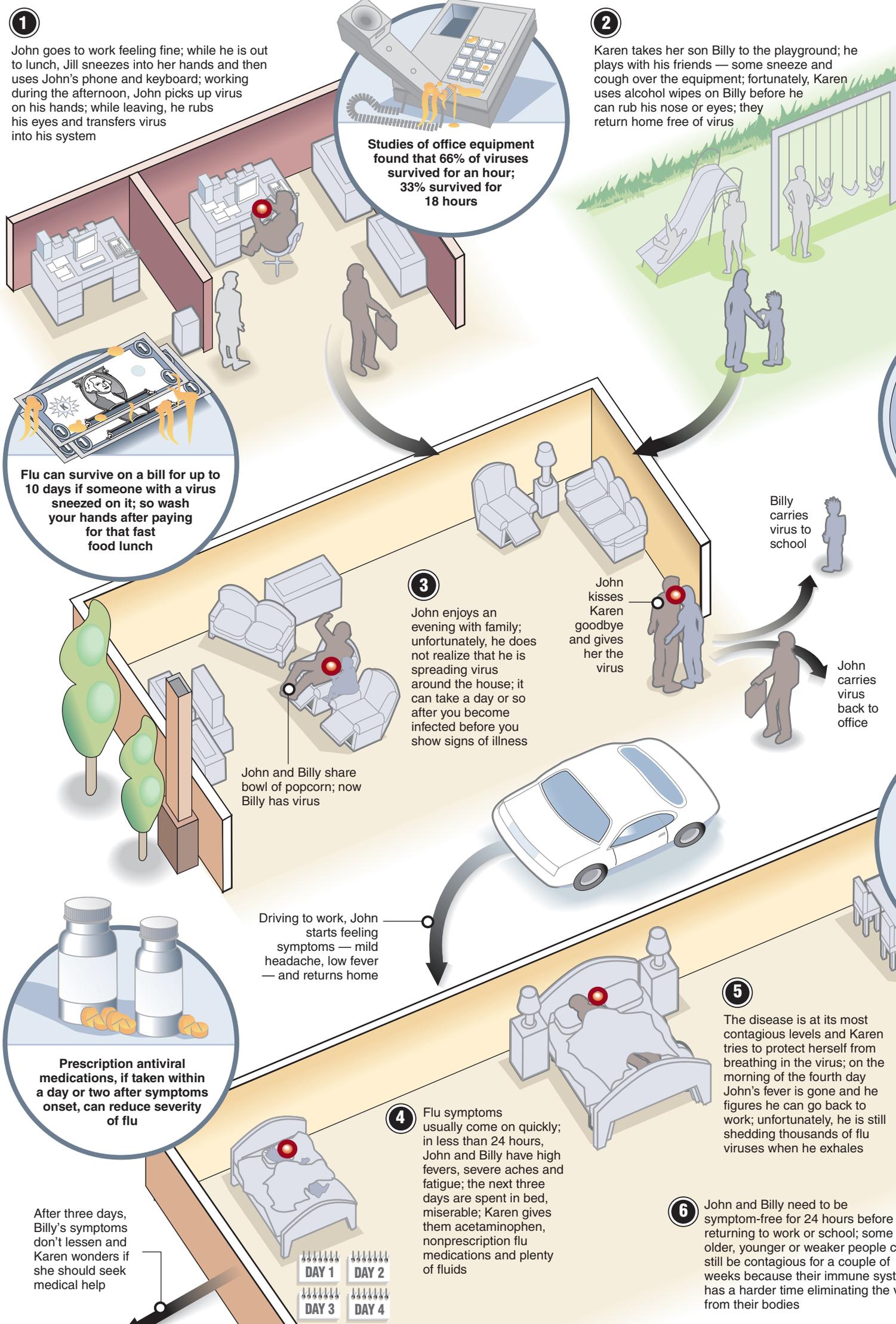
- Vaccination provides up to 90% protection
- Swine flu shots should be ready by October
- It takes about two weeks before protection begins
- H1N1 vaccination will be in two doses, a couple weeks apart; healthy adults may only need one H1N1 vaccination
- Seasonal flu vaccination is one shot, but for children under 9 they may need two seasonal flu shots, bringing the total to four

Wash hands

Wash hands five times a day for at least 20 seconds; this is what it takes to prevent the spread of germs and viruses; less than half the people wash this long and this often

Wear mask

Masks can be worn by sick people so any droplets they expel do not easily land on objects or people; most masks are not as effective if worn by people who are well trying to avoid breathing in a virus



1 John goes to work feeling fine; while he is out to lunch, Jill sneezes into her hands and then uses John's phone and keyboard; working during the afternoon, John picks up virus on his hands; while leaving, he rubs his eyes and transfers virus into his system

2 Karen takes her son Billy to the playground; he plays with his friends — some sneeze and cough over the equipment; fortunately, Karen uses alcohol wipes on Billy before he can rub his nose or eyes; they return home free of virus

Studies of office equipment found that 66% of viruses survived for an hour; 33% survived for 18 hours

Flu can survive on a bill for up to 10 days if someone with a virus sneezed on it; so wash your hands after paying for that fast food lunch

3 John enjoys an evening with family; unfortunately, he does not realize that he is spreading virus around the house; it can take a day or so after you become infected before you show signs of illness

John and Billy share bowl of popcorn; now Billy has virus

Driving to work, John starts feeling symptoms — mild headache, low fever — and returns home

Prescription antiviral medications, if taken within a day or two after symptoms onset, can reduce severity of flu

4 Flu symptoms usually come on quickly; in less than 24 hours, John and Billy have high fevers, severe aches and fatigue; the next three days are spent in bed, miserable; Karen gives them acetaminophen, nonprescription flu medications and plenty of fluids

After three days, Billy's symptoms don't lessen and Karen wonders if she should seek medical help

5 The disease is at its most contagious levels and Karen tries to protect herself from breathing in the virus; on the morning of the fourth day John's fever is gone and he figures he can go back to work; unfortunately, he is still shedding thousands of flu viruses when he exhales

6 John and Billy need to be symptom-free for 24 hours before returning to work or school; some older, younger or weaker people can still be contagious for a couple of weeks because their immune system has a harder time eliminating the virus from their bodies

