

## What You Should Know About “Swine Flu”

*Adopted from “Questions and Answers: Swine Influenza and You,” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention;  
[http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/swineflu\\_you.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/swineflu_you.htm))*

### **What is swine flu?**

Swine Influenza (swine flu) is a respiratory disease of pigs caused by type A influenza viruses; these viruses cause regular outbreaks in pigs. People do not normally get swine flu, but human infections can and do happen. Swine flu viruses have been reported to spread from person to person, but in the past, this transmission was limited and not sustained beyond three people.

### **Has the current swine flu infected humans in the United States?**

In late March and early April 2009, cases of human infection with swine influenza A (H1N1) viruses were first reported in Southern California and near San Antonio, Texas. Since then, cases have been reported in other U.S. states, and internationally as well. An updated case count of confirmed swine flu infections in the United States is kept at <http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/investigation.htm>. [CDC Update: As of April 29, 2009, 91 human cases of swine flu have been confirmed in 10 states with one death].

### **How serious is swine flu infection?**

Like seasonal flu, swine flu in humans can vary in severity from mild to severe. Between 2005 until January 2009, 12 human cases of swine flu were detected in the United States with no deaths occurring. However, swine flu infection can be serious. In September 1988, a previously healthy 32-year-old pregnant woman in Wisconsin was hospitalized for pneumonia after being infected with swine flu and died 8 days later. A swine flu outbreak in Fort Dix, NJ, occurred in 1976 that caused more than 200 cases with serious illness in several people and one death.

### **What are the signs and symptoms of swine flu in people?**

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. Some people have reported diarrhea and vomiting associated with swine flu. In the past, severe illness (pneumonia and respiratory failure) and deaths have been reported with swine flu infection in people. Like seasonal flu, swine flu may cause a worsening of underlying chronic medical conditions.

### **Is this swine flu virus contagious and how does it spread?**

CDC has determined that this swine influenza A (H1N1) virus is contagious and is spreading from human to human. It is thought to spread in the same way that seasonal flu spreads: mainly through

coughing or sneezing of people with influenza. Sometimes people may become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose.

### **How long can someone with swine flu infect someone else?**

Infected people may be able to infect others beginning 1 day before symptoms develop and up to 7 or more days after becoming sick. Children, especially younger children, might potentially be contagious for longer periods. That means that you may be able to pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick.

### **What should I do to keep from getting the flu?**

First and most important: wash your hands. Try to stay in good general health. Get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids, and eat nutritious food. Try not to touch surfaces that may be contaminated with the flu virus. Avoid close contact with people who are sick.

### **Are there medicines to treat swine flu?**

Yes. CDC recommends the use of oseltamivir (Tamiflu®) or zanamivir (Relenza®) for the treatment and/or prevention of infection with these swine influenza viruses. These antiviral drugs are prescription medicines (pills, liquid, or an inhaler) that fight against the flu by keeping flu viruses from reproducing in your body. If you get sick, antiviral drugs can make your illness milder and make you feel better faster. They may also prevent serious flu complications. For treatment, antiviral drugs work best if started soon after getting sick (within 2 days of symptoms).

### **What surfaces are most likely to be sources of contamination?**

Droplets from a cough or sneeze of an infected person move through the air and land on all sorts of surfaces, including desks, phones, and door knobs. Viruses can be spread when people touch these contaminated surfaces and then touch their own eyes, mouth, or nose before washing their hands. Frequent hand washing will help you reduce the chance of getting infected from these common surfaces.

### **What can I do to avoid catching or spreading swine flu?**

There is no vaccine available right now to protect against swine flu. There are everyday actions that can help prevent the spread of germs that cause respiratory illnesses like influenza. Take these everyday steps to protect your health:

- 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 water for 15 to 20 seconds, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- If you get sick with influenza, CDC recommends that you stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.

### **What should I do if I get sick?**

If you live in areas where swine influenza cases have been identified and become ill with influenza-like symptoms, including fever, body aches, runny nose, sore throat, nausea, or vomiting or diarrhea, you may want to contact your health care provider, who will determine whether influenza testing or treatment is needed.

You should stay home and avoid contact with other people as much as possible to keep from spreading your illness to others.

If you become ill and experience any of the following warning signs, seek emergency medical care:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting

Also seek emergency medical care if a child in the family displays any of the following signs:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Not waking up or not interacting
- Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough
- Fever with a rash

### **Can I get swine influenza from eating or preparing pork?**

No. Swine influenza viruses are not spread by food. You cannot get swine influenza from eating pork or pork products. Eating properly handled and cooked pork products is safe.

### **Where can I get more information on “swine flu”?**

Go to any of the following websites:

<http://www.who.int>

<http://www.cdc.gov>

<http://www.aphis.usda.gov>

<http://www.avma.org>

<http://www.agnr.umd.edu>

Call University of Maryland Extension at 301-314-2805 or 301-405-7992

Or contact Dr. Nathaniel Tablante: 301-314-6810; [nlt@umd.edu](mailto:nlt@umd.edu) or Dr. Daniel Perez: 301-314-6811; [dperez1@umd.edu](mailto:dperez1@umd.edu)