

Basics of Swine Flu

What is swine flu? Swine influenza (swine flu) is a respiratory disease of pigs caused by type A influenza viruses. People do not normally get swine flu, but human infections can and do happen and can be spread from person to person.

Is swine flu virus contagious? The CDC has determined that the current strain of swine influenza A (H1N1) virus is contagious and is spreading from human to human. At this time, it is not known how easily the virus is being spread between people.

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.

How does swine flu spread? Spread of the swine flu virus is thought to be happening in the same way that seasonal flu spreads. Flu viruses are spread mainly from person to person 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 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 U.S. with no deaths occurring. However, swine flu infection can be serious. While there have been no deaths in the United States as a result of the 2009 outbreak except for a Mexican child who had traveled to the U.S. for a visit, there have been deaths in Mexico.

What should I do if I get sick? Those who 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, should contact their health care professional immediately. Health care professionals will be able to determine whether influenza testing or treatment is needed.

Those who are sick should stay home and avoid contact with other people as much as possible to keep from spreading the illness to others.

Significant warning signs such as the following require emergency medical care:

In adults, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath

Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen

Sudden dizziness

Confusion

Severe or persistent vomiting

In children, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

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

What can I do to protect myself from getting sick? There is no vaccine available right now to protect against swine flu. There are everyday and effective actions that can help prevent the spread of germs that cause respiratory illnesses like influenza:

Cover nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. Throw the tissue in the trash after use.

Wash hands often with soap and water, especially after coughing or sneezing. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.

Avoid touching eyes, nose, or mouth. Germs spread this way.

Stay hydrated. This is the best way to avoid a compromised immune system.

Avoid close contact with people who are sick.

The CDC recommends that individuals who are sick from influenza should stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.

What is the best way to keep from spreading the virus through coughing or sneezing?

Limit contact with other people as much as possible. Do not go to work or school if ill and report your symptoms to your physician. Mouth and nose should be covered with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. Put used tissues in the waste basket. Cover coughs or sneezes if a tissue is unavailable, then clean hands after each cough or sneeze.

What is the best technique for washing my hands to avoid getting the flu? Washing hands often will help protect against germs. Wash with soap and water or clean with alcohol-based hand cleaner. The CDC recommends that hands be washed with soap and warm water for at least 15 to 20 seconds. When soap and water are not available, alcohol-based disposable hand wipes or gel sanitizers may be used.

Are there medicines to treat swine flu? Yes. Antiviral drugs are prescription medicines that fight against the flu by keeping flu viruses from reproducing in the body. Antiviral drugs can make the illness milder and make an individual feel better faster. They may also prevent serious flu complications. For treatment, antiviral drugs work best if started soon after getting sick (within two days of symptoms).

How will insurance cover any treatment I need if I have symptoms of swine flu?

If you become ill, you should seek medical care immediately. Medically necessary services for the diagnosis and treatment of swine flu will be covered in accordance with the terms of your benefit plan. Emergency and urgent care services for individuals traveling outside their local service area or traveling outside the United States are covered at the in-network benefit level regardless of where the care is received.

When can someone with the flu infect someone else? Infected people may be able to infect others beginning one day before symptoms develop and up to seven or more days after becoming sick. That

means that individuals may be able to pass on the flu before they know they are sick, as well as while they are sick. Children, especially younger children, might potentially be contagious for longer periods.

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.

Where can I get more information on swine flu?

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) <http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu>

World Health Organization (WHO) <http://www.who.int/csr/disease/swineflu/en/index.html>

US Government Pandemic Preparedness www.pandemicflu.gov

International SOS Preparedness Protocols (ISOS)
<http://www.internationalsos.com/pandemicpreparedness/>