

PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET

Swine Flu

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What is swine influenza?

Swine influenza (swine flu) is a respiratory disease of pigs caused by a type of influenza virus. Outbreaks of swine flu happen regularly in pigs. People do not normally get swine flu, but human infections can and do happen. Most commonly, human cases of swine flu happen in people who are around pigs but it's possible for swine flu viruses to spread from one person to another. In the United States there were 12 cases of swine flu in people from 2006 through 2008. In March and April 2009 there have been many more cases of swine flu than usual in both Mexico and the U.S. and the infections have spread from one person to another.

What are the symptoms of swine flu in people?

Swine flu causes symptoms very similar to seasonal (or human) flu. The most common symptoms of swine flu, like seasonal flu, are fever, cough, and sore throat and can include body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people also have diarrhea and vomiting. There have been some people with swine flu who have been sicker and have even died.

Is swine flu treatable in people?

People sick with any type of flu should make sure to drink enough fluids, get plenty of rest, eat healthy foods, wash hands frequently and stay home to avoid spreading the flu to other people. The kinds of drugs used to treat seasonal flu, called antivirals, can also be used to treat swine flu. There have been a few influenza viruses, including the most recent swine flu, that are resistant to some, but not all, of these drugs. Healthcare providers may recommend that people who are sick or appear to be sick with swine flu receive an antiviral medication.

How would I know if I have swine flu?

If you have symptoms of influenza as described above, and especially if you have recently traveled to an area where there have been human cases of swine flu, contact your healthcare provider who will decide what type of testing and treatment is right for you. To diagnose any kind of flu virus, a swab of the inside of your nose needs to be collected by a doctor. Identification of a swine flu virus requires special laboratory testing.

If you think you might have swine flu and you need to see your health care provider, you should call ahead and let them know you might have the flu. That way, precautions can be taken to avoid the spread of flu to others.

What if I recently traveled to a region where swine flu in humans has been found?

If you have recently traveled to an area affected by swine flu, be watchful for any flu-like symptoms. If you are experiencing any of these symptoms, stay home to avoid exposing others and contact your healthcare provider; your healthcare provider will decide what type of testing and treatment is right for you. To diagnose any kind of flu virus, a swab of the inside of your nose needs to be collected by a doctor. Identification of a swine flu virus requires special laboratory testing.

How can I protect myself and others from swine flu?

You can protect yourself and others from swine flu the same way that you can protect yourself from seasonal flu. Avoid holding, hugging, kissing, or shaking hands with anyone who has a cold or the flu. Wash your hands often with soap and warm water, or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Avoid touching your nose, mouth or eyes. Clean things that are touched often like door handles, telephones, etc. If you get sick with a flu-like illness stay home from work and school and avoid contact with others so the virus does not spread.

All people with swine flu who are not hospitalized, and their household and other close contacts, will need to stay at home to prevent spread of illness to other people.

If I have swine flu, can I stay at home?

People with mild or moderate illness can and should be cared for at home to prevent spread. Things people who have swine flu who are cared for at home should do include:

- check with their health care provider about any special care they might need if they are pregnant or have a health condition such as diabetes, heart disease, asthma, or emphysema
- check with their health care provider about whether they should take antiviral medications
- stay home for at least 7 days after onset of illness; or until free of symptoms (including fever) for 24 hours, whichever is longer
- get plenty of rest
- drink clear fluids (such as water, broth, sports drinks, electrolyte beverages for infants) to keep from being dehydrated
- cover coughs and sneezes. Clean hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub often and especially after using tissues and after coughing or sneezing into hands.
- Never cough in the direction of someone else.
- avoid close contact with others – do not go to work or school while ill
- be watchful for emergency warning signs (see below) that might indicate you need to seek medical attention

Get medical care right away if the sick person at home:

- has difficulty breathing or chest pain
- has purple or blue discoloration of the lips
- is vomiting and unable to keep liquids down
- has signs of dehydration such as dizziness when standing, absence of urination, or in infants, a lack of tears when they cry
- has seizures (for example, uncontrolled convulsions) is less responsive than normal or becomes confused

Is there a vaccine for swine flu?

No. Right now there is no vaccine for swine flu. According to CDC, it is unlikely that the vaccine for seasonal flu will prevent swine flu.

Is it safe to cook and eat pork and pork products?

Yes. It is safe to eat properly handled and cooked pork and pork products. Swine flu viruses are not spread by food. You cannot get swine flu from eating pork or pork products.

Why is swine flu important?

Approximately every 20-40 years, a new strain of the flu virus appears which is very different from the ordinary seasonal flu virus. When this happens most people do not have immunity to this new strain of flu virus and it can spread to many people, across the world, over a short period of time. This is called an influenza pandemic. Some people think that swine flu viruses might play a role in the start of the next pandemic.

For more information about seasonal flu, pandemic flu, avian flu and swine flu, please visit the websites listed below or contact the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Division of Epidemiology and Immunization at 617-983-6800.

- **Massachusetts Department of Public Health website on influenza**
<http://www.mass.gov/dph/flu>
- **Center for Disease Control (CDC) websites on swine flu**
<http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/>

April 27, 2009

Swine Flu: Guidelines for Schools

April 29, 2009 - The U.S. government has started to take the necessary steps to prevent swine flu from becoming widespread, including urging that non-essential travel to Mexico be avoided. Additionally, the government is putting out a lot of information on how to prevent the spread of the disease. The World Health Organization has raised the pandemic phase alert to level 4, signifying that, currently, there is sustained human to human transmission, and that it is imperative that all sectors of society be proactive in combating the disease. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) are currently reporting 91 confirmed cases and one death. The virus has infected people in ten states: Texas, Ohio, New York, Nevada, Michigan, Massachusetts, Kansas, Indiana, California, and Arizona.

According to the CDC, the 1918 flu pandemic experience relays the importance of intervening quickly and the need to involve the entire community in preventing the spread of the disease.

Schools can often be a disease spreading haven because they house hundreds to thousands of people in a confined location. In the U.S., news of the outbreak first happened at a Queens, New York private school where 28 cases have now been confirmed. The school was closed for a few days and now there are reports of Texas and California schools being closed. The median age of all cases in the U.S. so far is 16 years. Therefore, schools need to have an active role in containing the spread of the disease as it is affecting the school-age population.

The CDC's Swine Influenza site contains a significant amount of information on swine flu and what can be done to prevent it. Questions from school districts, state education offices, and education associations across the country are continuously being answered on the site.

The CDC and U.S. Department of Education have recommended that schools be closed when there is a confirmed case of swine flu or a suspected case that has been epidemiologically linked to a confirmed case. Broader school dismissal should be left to the discretion of local authorities with the advice of the local health department and should take into account the extent of the illness in the community. If there is a school closure, it is also advised that all school activities be canceled and that parents and students avoid congregating outside of the school. Schools should also consult with their local or state health departments for guidance on reopening. The CDC has interim guidance available on its website to help with such school and community mitigation.

The following are some additional recommendations put out by the CDC and the U.S. Department of Education:

- Inform students, parents and staff about the symptoms, which can include cough, sore throat, body aches, headaches and a fever, and stress preventive measures

such as washing hands frequently and covering your mouth when coughing or sneezing.

- Refer students who are complaining of flu-like symptoms to a health care provider, but also follow confidentiality guidelines. Experts state that there is no need to single out students who have recently been to Mexico and that they should only be asked to stay at home if presenting flu symptoms.
- Use mitigation strategies such as home isolation and social distancing by asking that those who have the flu stay at home for seven days after the onset of the disease.
- Monitor closely the health of school populations and communicate with local health authorities, political leaders, and communities.
- Consult with state school boards associations, school districts, and other education organizations that may have useful guidelines in dealing with such an outbreak. The Washington State School Director's Association produced a six-page publication on preparing schools for a flu pandemic with tips about policy considerations and other issues school boards should think about in response to a pandemic.