

Swine Flu Questions & Answers

What is swine flu?

Swine influenza is a respiratory disease of pigs caused by type A influenza viruses. Outbreaks of swine flu happen regularly in pigs. People do not normally get swine flu. Swine flu jumps to humans most often among people who are around pigs. The virus becomes a bigger threat when it acquires the ability to be transmitted person to person.

Are there human infections with swine flu in the U.S.?

In late March and early April 2009, cases of human infection with swine influenza A viruses were first reported in Southern California and near San Antonio, Texas. As of April 30, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has confirmed 109 cases of swine flu in the United States. So far, the outbreak is limited to 11 states: 14 cases in California, 50 in New York, 26 in Texas, 10 cases in South Carolina, one in Ohio, Arizona, Nevada, Indiana and Michigan and two cases in Kansas and Massachusetts.

Are there human infections with swine flu in the Missouri?

Currently, there is one probable case of swine flu in Platte County in western Missouri. Health officials are working to determine who might have been exposed before the patient showed symptoms. Missouri is awaiting confirmation from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's laboratory in Atlanta, GA. The time for the CDC to complete these tests is currently averaging two days.

Is this swine flu virus contagious?

CDC has determined that this virus is contagious and is spreading from human to human. However, at this time, it not known how easily the virus spreads 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. Like seasonal flu, swine flu may cause a worsening of underlying chronic medical conditions. Some people have reported diarrhea and vomiting associated with swine flu. In the past, swine flu has led to medical complications, including pneumonia and respiratory failure.

How do you catch swine flu?

Spread of swine flu can occur in two ways:

- Through contact with infected pigs or environments contaminated with swine flu viruses;
- Through contact with a person with swine flu.

Human-to-human spread of swine flu has been documented and is thought to occur in the same way as seasonal flu. Influenza is thought to spread primarily person to person through coughing or sneezing by infected people.

Are there medicines to treat swine flu?

Yes. Public health officials recommend the use of oseltamivir or zanamivir for the treatment and/or prevention of infection with these swine influenza viruses. These antiviral drugs are prescription medicines 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 within two days of symptoms.

How long can an infected person spread swine flu to others?

People with the swine influenza virus infection become contagious the day before they begin feeling ill. They should be considered potentially contagious as long as they have symptoms and for possibly up to 7 days following illness onset. Children, especially younger children, might potentially be contagious for longer periods.

What can I do to protect myself from getting sick?

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

- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- If you get the flu, the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services recommends that you stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them. Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.

What should I do if I get sick?

If you have recently traveled to areas currently reporting swine flu cases, or have been in direct contact with someone who has, and believe you are becoming ill with influenza-like symptoms, contact a local health care provider. Symptoms include fever, body aches, runny nose, sore throat, nausea, or vomiting or diarrhea.

Your health care provider will determine whether influenza testing or treatment is needed. If you are sick, 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.

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

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

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.

How can I gain additional information?

To learn more about swine flu, and for more details on the state and federal investigation, please visit Missouri's swine influenza web site at www.dhss.mo.gov/BT_Response/SwineFlu09.html.