



May 5, 2009

APUA Fact Sheet: 2009 H1N1/ “Swine Flu”

What is “swine” influenza?

Swine influenza, or flu, is a common respiratory disease of pigs caused by type A influenza virus. It was first identified in pig isolates in 1930. In pigs, the virus causes high levels of illness, but low death rates. While humans do not typically contract swine flu, it can happen, and has in this instance. Most commonly, human cases of swine flu happen in people exposed to pigs, but it’s possible for swine flu viruses to spread from one person to another, as is currently occurring. In the past, this transmission was limited and not sustained beyond three people, but as of now, the case-count now is still rising, and attributable to person-to-person transmission. The current H1N1 strain is a novel mixture of swine, avian, and human viruses. Thus, more surveillance and research is being conducted in order to better understand the infectivity, severity, and implications of the virus.

What is a pandemic?

A pandemic is a global outbreak of disease. An influenza pandemic occurs when a new influenza A virus emerges for which there is little or no immunity in the human population, begins to cause serious illness, and then spreads easily person-to-person worldwide. Currently, H1N1 2009 is at WHO pandemic alert level 5 out of 6. The WHO pandemic alert levels are not a measure of severity, but rather a measure of spread.

How common is swine flu infection in humans?

In 1976, there was an outbreak of swine flu in more than 200 soldiers at Fort Dix. Between 1976 and the current outbreak, CDC has reported approximately one case per year, though there were 12 between December 2005 and February 2009. As of May 5th, 2009, 403 cases of swine flu have been confirmed in 38 states. Globally, there are 1490 confirmed cases in 21 countries, according to the World Health Organization. Due to the global sustained spread of flu in humans, the WHO declared it a stage 5 pandemic on April 30th, 2009. For an updated case-count, see: <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/>

What are the symptoms of swine flu in people?

Swine flu causes symptoms very similar to seasonal human flu. The most common symptoms are fever, cough, and sore throat, and can include body aches, headache, chills, and fatigue. Some people may experience vomiting and diarrhea. * (warning signs, p. 3)

How does swine flu spread?

This swine influenza virus spreads 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. This is possible because viruses can live on surfaces for up to 2 hours.

How would I know if I have swine flu?

If you have symptoms of influenza as described above, and if you have traveled to an area where there have been confirmed human cases of swine flu, contact your healthcare provider to determine what type of testing and treatment is right for you. If you think you might have the swine flu and need to see your healthcare provider, be sure to call ahead to 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. The incubation period for swine flu is approximately 1 to 7 days after exposure. If you are experiencing any symptoms, stay home to avoid exposing others and contact your healthcare provider.

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 and common colds.

- Wash your hands often with soap and warm water, or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Avoid touching your nose, mouth, or eyes.
- 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.
- Avoid holding, hugging, kissing, or shaking hands with anyone who has a cold or the flu.
- Disinfect things that are touched often like door handles, telephones, etc.

What is the best technique for washing my hands to avoid getting the flu?

Washing your hands often will help protect you from germs. Wash thoroughly with soap and water, or clean with alcohol-based hand cleaner. CDC recommends that when you wash your hands--with soap and warm water--that you wash for 15 to 20 seconds. Always wash your hands before eating, and after using the bathroom.

Is swine flu treatable in people?

People sick with any type of flu should get plenty of rest, drink fluids to remain hydrated, eat healthy foods, wash hands frequently, and most importantly, stay home to avoid spreading the flu to other people. Antivirals can be used to treat swine flu, if necessary. Healthcare providers may recommend that people who are sick or appear to be sick with swine flu receive an antiviral medication. The antivirals in the United States licensed to treat influenza, which the flu is not resistant to, are oseltamivir and zanamivir.

Will taking antibiotics help me prevent getting swine flu?

No, antibiotics cannot be used to treat or prevent influenza. Antibiotics are used in the treatment of bacterial infections, and influenza is caused by a virus.

Can people catch swine flu from eating pork?

No, swine influenza viruses are not transmitted by food. You cannot get swine flu from eating pork or pork products.

What are health authorities like the United States CDC doing?

CDC has implemented its emergency response plan to reduce transmission, mitigate illness severity, and provide information to help health care providers, public health officials, and the public address the challenges posed by the new virus. Epidemiological investigations are being conducted.

*** What are warning signs that a child needs urgent medical attention?**

- 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 are warning signs that an adult needs urgent medical attention?**

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

For more information, please visit

<http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/>

<http://www.who.int/csr/disease/swineflu/en/index.html>

http://www.mass.gov/?pageID=eohhs2terminal&L=6&L0=Home&L1=Provider&L2=Guidelines+and+Resources&L3=Guidelines+for+Services+%26+Planning&L4=Diseases+and+Conditions&L5=Influenza&sid=Eeohhs2&b=terminalcontent&f=dph_cdc_c_flu_swine&csid=Eeohhs2

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Massachusetts Department of Public Health. Public Health Fact Sheet: Swine Flu.

World Health Organization. Swine influenza frequently asked questions.