

**SWINE FLU QUESTIONS**

**What is swine flu?**

Swine Influenza, also called swine flu, 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, 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 person to person.

**Is swine flu the same as seasonal flu?**

No. Seasonal flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by human influenza viruses. It can cause mild to severe illness and at times can lead to death. Human flu viruses change a little bit every year which is why people can get sick from the flu more than once. It is also why a new flu vaccine is produced each year; the vaccine must be made to protect against the particular viruses circulating that year.

**Is this the same as the bird flu (avian flu) we've been hearing about?**

No. There are many different types of influenza viruses. The bird flu virus that has been watched closely is categorized as influenza A (H5N1), and is transmitted primarily among birds. This virus has not been found in the United States.

**Which states have confirmed swine flu cases?**

Cases of human infection with swine influenza A (H1N1) have now been confirmed in 10 states, including New York State. Fifty of the 51 confirmed cases in New York State are in New York City residents. The current U.S. confirmed case count is provided below.

<b>U.S. Human Cases of Swine Flu Infection</b> (As of April 29, 2009, 11:00 AM ET)		
<b>States</b>	<b># of laboratory confirmed cases</b>	<b>Deaths</b>
Arizona	1	
California	14	
Indiana	1	
Kansas	2	
Massachusetts	2	
Michigan	2	
Nevada	1	
New York State	51	
Ohio	1	
Texas	16	1
<b>TOTAL COUNTS</b>	<b>91 cases</b>	<b>1 death</b>

## **What other countries have confirmed swine flu cases?**

As of April 28, 2009, eight countries outside of the United States have officially reported cases of swine influenza A/H1N1 infection. Mexico has reported 26 confirmed human cases of infection including seven deaths.

The following countries have reported laboratory confirmed cases with no deaths – Austria (1), Canada (13), Germany (3), New Zealand (3), the United Kingdom (5), Israel (2) and Spain (4).

Further information on the situation will be available on the World Health Organization website on a regular basis.

<http://www.who.int/csr/don/en/>

## **How are people getting sick from swine flu?**

CDC has determined that this swine flu virus is spreading from person to person. Spread from person to person is thought to occur in the same way as seasonal flu, mainly through coughing or sneezing of infected people. However, at this time, it not known how easily the swine flu virus spreads between people.

## **Is swine flu the same as pandemic flu?**

Rarely, an influenza virus undergoes a major change that results in a completely new virus. If the new virus spreads easily from person to person it is called a pandemic. All human influenza pandemics in the past have been caused by human influenza viruses. Swine flu viruses have caused human infections before without becoming a pandemic flu virus. It is unknown whether this current swine flu A (H1N1) virus could become a pandemic.

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

The few cases found in the United States so far have been mild. 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. Like seasonal flu, swine flu can vary in severity from mild to severe, and may cause a worsening of underlying chronic medical conditions. The severity of illness from the current swine flu strain is not yet clear.

## **Can swine flu be treated?**

Yes. This swine flu virus is susceptible to certain antiviral drugs used to treat flu infections. For treatment, antiviral drugs work best if started soon after getting sick (within 2 days of symptoms). If you become ill and are diagnosed with influenza, your doctor can determine if you should take antiviral drugs.

[Background if further questions: Tamiflu and Relenza are recommended for treatment of swine flu. Antiviral drugs are prescription medicines (pills, liquid or an inhaler) that fight against the flu by keeping flu viruses from reproducing in the body. Antiviral drugs can make influenza illness milder and may also prevent serious flu complications.]

### **Should I ask my doctor for a prescription anti-flu drug?**

**I read that antiviral drugs can make any illness milder and make you feel better faster. They may also prevent serious flu complications. Can I take them to prevent infection?**

**I read that antiviral drugs can make any illness milder and make you feel better faster. They may also prevent serious flu complications. Do I need a prescription or are they available over-the-counter? Do most insurers cover these drugs?**

No. Antiviral drugs are usually used to treat people who are at risk for developing life-threatening complications from the flu. There is no reason to routinely ask for one of these drugs to keep at home, or to take them just as a precaution. Over-use could result in limited supplies for those who need it most. In addition, over-use of antiviral drugs has been known to lead to flu viruses becoming resistant to the drugs. All drugs, including antivirals, can cause side effects and should only be used when necessary under the direction of a health care provider.

Health insurance may cover the cost of these drugs. You should talk to your health insurance company to find out if you are covered for these medications.

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

People with swine flu infection should be considered potentially contagious as long as they are symptomatic or possibly for up to 7 days following illness onset. 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. Eating properly handled and cooked pork products is safe.

### **Is there a vaccine against swine flu?**

There is currently no human vaccine against swine flu. It is not known whether the current human flu vaccine provides partial protection against swine flu. CDC has already begun development of a vaccine for swine flu, but this will not be available for months.

### **What is the current swine flu situation in New York State?**

There are currently 51 confirmed swine flu cases in New York State. Fifty of the 51 confirmed cases in New York State are in New York City residents. Forty-five of the 51 New York State confirmed cases are associated with students and staff at St. Francis Preparatory School in Queens, New York City. New York City health officials reported more than 100 students and staff at the private school had flu-like symptoms. The school is cancelling classes for the remainder of the week in response to the outbreak.

The NYCDOHMH has issued recommendations for New York City residents on their web site, at: <http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/home/home.shtml>

### **What is New York State doing to find out if swine flu is in New York?**

The New York State Department of Health conducts flu surveillance throughout the year. To ensure rapid detection if any swine flu cases occur here, the New York State Department of Health is testing selected laboratory samples from people who are suspected of having swine flu.

### **Can I get tested for swine flu?**

You should see your doctor if you are ill. Your doctor may decide to do testing for flu, and request special testing for swine flu if indicated. The New York State Department of Health has provided guidance to health care providers throughout the state regarding who should be tested for swine flu and what specimens to collect.

### **What can I do to protect myself from getting sick?**

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, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.

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

If you 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, particularly if you are worried about your symptoms. Be sure to tell your doctor if you have recently traveled, especially to states in the U.S. or to other countries where swine flu has already been confirmed. Your health care provider will determine whether influenza testing or treatment is needed.

### **What can I do to keep from infecting other people?**

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

### **I read that they closed schools in Mexico City and in NYC. Should I keep my child home from school as a precaution?**

At this time, there is not enough information to close schools that are not experiencing an outbreak. Healthy students are not recommended to stay home from school. Monitor your child for influenza-like symptoms, including fever, body aches, runny nose, sore throat, nausea, or vomiting or diarrhea, and keep your child home if they are sick. You may want to contact their health care provider, particularly if you are worried about these symptoms. Be sure to tell your doctor if you have recently traveled, especially to states in the U.S. or to other countries where swine flu has already been confirmed. Your health care provider will determine whether influenza testing or treatment is needed.

New York State and Local health departments will assist schools that think they may be experiencing a flu outbreak to determine what action should be taken.

### **Should I avoid travel to Mexico or areas of the United States where swine flu has been identified?**

At this time, CDC recommends that U.S. travelers avoid all nonessential travel to Mexico. Changes to this recommendation will be posted at <http://wwwn.cdc.gov/travel/>.

1. Please check this site frequently for updates.
2. Practice healthy habits to help stop the spread of influenza:
  - Wash your hands often with soap and water. This removes germs from your skin and helps prevent diseases from spreading.
  - Use waterless alcohol-based hand gels (containing at least 60% alcohol) when soap is not available and hands are not visibly dirty.
  - Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze and put your used tissue in a wastebasket.
  - If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve, not your hands.
  - Wash your hands after coughing or sneezing, using soap and water or an alcohol-based hand gel.
  - Follow all local health recommendations. For example, you may be asked to put on a surgical mask to protect others.
  - Seek medical care if you feel sick
3. After you return from your trip:
  - Pay close attention to your health for 10 days.
  - If you become sick with a fever plus a cough, sore throat or have trouble breathing during this 10-day period, see a doctor.
  - When you make the appointment, tell the doctor—
    - your symptoms,
    - where you traveled, and
    - if you have had close contact with a sick person or farm animals. This way, he or she can be aware that you have traveled to an area reporting swine influenza.
4. Do not travel when you are sick, unless it is to get medical care. By limiting contact with others as much as possible, you can help prevent the spread of an infectious illness.

**I traveled to states in the U.S. or to other countries where they are reporting confirmed swine flu cases. What are my chances of getting ill? What should I do if I feel sick?**

**My child had contact with a student at St. Francis Prep School or played in a sports event against the school. Should I be concerned? What should I do?**

It is not possible to know if you/your child were exposed to swine flu or to determine how likely it is that someone exposed would become sick.

If you/your child 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, particularly if you are worried about your symptoms. Be sure to tell your doctor if you have recently traveled, especially to those areas where swine flu has already been found, including or if you/your child had contact with someone who is ill with swine flu. Your health care provider will determine whether influenza testing or treatment is needed.

## **GENERAL SEASONAL INFLUENZA QUESTIONS**

### **What is influenza (flu)?**

Influenza, commonly called "the flu," is caused by the influenza virus, which infects the respiratory tract (nose, throat, bronchial tubes, and lungs).

### **What are the symptoms of the flu?**

Influenza is a respiratory illness. Symptoms of flu include fever, headache, extreme tiredness, dry cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, and muscle aches. Children can have additional gastrointestinal symptoms, such as nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea, but these symptoms are uncommon in adults. Although the term "stomach flu" is sometimes used to describe vomiting, nausea, or diarrhea, those illnesses are caused by certain other viruses, bacteria, or possibly parasites, and are rarely related to influenza.

### **Is the "stomach flu" really the flu?**

No. Many people use the term "stomach flu" to describe illnesses with nausea, vomiting or diarrhea. These symptoms can be caused by many different viruses, bacteria or even parasites. While vomiting, diarrhea, and being nauseous or "sick to your stomach" can sometimes be related to influenza – more commonly in children than adults – these problems are rarely the usual symptoms of influenza. The flu is a respiratory disease and not a stomach or intestinal disease.

### **Does the flu have complications?**

Yes, it may. Some of the complications caused by flu include bacterial pneumonia, dehydration, and worsening of chronic medical conditions, such as heart disease, lung disease, asthma, or diabetes. Children may get sinus problems and ear infections as complications from the flu. Those aged 65 years and older and persons of any age with chronic medical conditions (such as asthma, diabetes, or heart disease) are at highest risk for serious complications of flu.

### **How does the flu spread?**

The main way that influenza viruses are spread is from person to person in respiratory droplets of coughs and sneezes. This can happen when droplets from a cough or sneeze of an infected person are propelled through the air and deposited on the mouth or nose of people nearby (generally up to 6 feet). Though less frequent, influenza viruses can also be spread when a person touches respiratory droplets on another person or an object and then touches their own mouth or nose before washing their hands.

### **How long is a person with flu virus contagious?**

The period when an infected person is contagious depends on the age and health of the person. With swine flu, infected people may be able to infect others beginning 1 day before symptoms develop and up to 7 or more days after becoming sick. Some young children and people with weakened immune systems may be contagious for longer than a week.

### **How soon will I get sick if I am exposed to the flu?**

The time from when a person is exposed to flu virus to when symptoms begin is about one to four days, with an average of about two days.

**How do I find out if I have the flu?**

It is very difficult to distinguish the flu from other viral or bacterial causes of respiratory illnesses on the basis of symptoms alone. A laboratory test, usually involving a swab of the throat or nose, can confirm that an illness is caused by influenza virus if the patient is tested within the first two to three days after symptoms begin.

**If I got the flu last year, will I have immunity against the flu this year?**

It's important to remember that influenza viruses are constantly changing. Protection made by the body against one strain of influenza will become less effective against new strains that develop over time. This is the reason that there is a new flu vaccine each year and that people need to be vaccinated every year.

**Can the flu vaccine cause the flu?**

No. The flu vaccine shot is made from killed influenza viruses so the vaccine cannot cause flu disease. If people get sick shortly after receiving the influenza vaccine shot, it is because they were already infected with either influenza virus or another type of virus or bacteria at the time they received the shot.

**How many people get sick or die from the flu every year in the U.S.?**

Each flu season is unique, but it is estimated that, on average, approximately 5% to 20% of U.S. residents get the flu each year, and more than 200,000 persons are hospitalized for flu-related complications each year. About 36,000 Americans die on average per year from the complications of flu.

**When is the flu season in the United States?**

In the United States, the peak of flu season has occurred anywhere from late November through March. The overall health impact (that is, infections, hospitalizations, and deaths) of a flu season varies from year to year.

**How do the NYSDOH and CDC monitor the progress of the flu season?**

The NYSDOH and CDC collect data and monitor flu reports year-round and post reports on influenza activity each week from October through May. These reports are available as follows:

NYSDOH: <http://www.health.state.ny.us/diseases/communicable/influenza/surveillance/>

CDC: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/weekly/fluactivity.htm>

Components of influenza surveillance in NYS include:

1. Reports from laboratories of number of positive influenza lab tests.
2. Reports of influenza-like activity from members of the Sentinel Physician Influenza Surveillance program.
3. Reports of influenza outbreaks from hospitals and nursing homes.
4. Reports from health care providers of suspected or confirmed influenza-associated pediatric deaths.