

Swine Flu Facts

What is Swine Flu?

Swine influenza A (H1N1) virus is normally found in pigs. There are many such viruses and they rarely infect humans. The virus currently causing human illness is a new type of swine flu that has developed the ability to infect people and be transmitted from person to person.

Although this new virus is called “swine flu” it is not transmitted from eating pork products. Like other respiratory diseases, it is spread from person to person through coughs and sneezes. When people cough or sneeze, they spread germs through the air or onto surfaces that other people may touch.

Precautions and Symptoms

Infection occurs when the virus gets into someone’s airway and lungs. However, it isn’t yet known how easily the virus spreads. As with any infectious disease that is spread through the human respiratory system, health officials recommended the following precautions:

- 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 with soap and water frequently, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hands cleaners are also effective;
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people;
- If you get sick, stay home and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them;
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.

These are the same precautions that should be taken to stop transmitting all influenza viruses and other viruses that are transmitted from the respiratory tract.

Human symptoms for this new type of swine flu are similar to the symptoms of the regular “seasonal” influenza that happens each year. Symptoms include fever, cough and sore throat. In addition, fatigue, lack of appetite, runny nose, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea have been reported.

Treatment

There is currently no vaccine to prevent swine flu, but there are medications to help treat it. These medicines are generally used to prevent serious flu complications such as pneumonia and work best if started soon after getting sick (within 2 days of symptoms). Whether a person with influenza needs to take one of these medicines is a decision that must be made by the patient and their health care provider.