

# Swine Influenza

Human cases of swine influenza A (H1N1) have been identified in several states of the United States and in other countries, including Mexico. This is a novel influenza A virus that has not been identified in people before and human-to-human transmission of the virus appears to be ongoing. Unlike the experience in Mexico, the United States is currently observing a less severe disease with infection by the identical virus strain. As of April 26, 2009, of the confirmed cases of swine influenza A (H1N1) infection, only two confirmed case-patients were hospitalized and none have died in the United States. In Mexico, officials have reported several hundred suspected cases, including several deaths from confirmed H1N1 infection. Many people have experienced rapidly progressive pneumonia and acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS). Therefore, the experience of these two countries has been markedly different to date.

## Being Prepared for Swine Influenza

### What is swine flu?

Swine flu is a respiratory disease which infects pigs. It does not normally infect humans, although sporadic cases do occur, usually in people who have had close contact with pigs.

### How contagious is swine flu?

Human-to-human transmission has occurred in some instances but is typically limited to close physical contact and closed groups of people. The infectious period for a case of swine flu is 1 day prior to the onset of symptoms to 7 days after.

### Why should I be concerned about swine flu?

If the virus adapts so that it can spread easily from person to person, it could cause a pandemic, resulting in:

- widespread disease outbreaks
- restrictions on the movement of people
- potentially large numbers of sick and dying
- business closures and transport systems disruptions

### What are the symptoms of swine flu?

Clinical symptoms generally are similar to seasonal influenza. Infected individuals report:

- fever
- cough
- sore throat
- muscle aches, headache
- sudden breathing problems
- other possible symptoms: diarrhea and vomiting

### What is the difference between flu and a cold?

- Flu symptoms are usually more severe than cold symptoms and can affect the whole body. Flu usually starts suddenly with high fever, chills, severe body aches, extreme tiredness, headache, and dry cough. A person with the flu is contagious for 24 hours before becoming sick and for 3-5 days after becoming sick.
- Colds are generally milder than flu and usually affect just the nose and throat. Colds begin slowly with a sore or scratchy throat, sneezing, and runny or stuffy nose; a mild cough develops a few days later. Fever is rare in adults and older children, and extreme tiredness is not a cold symptom.

### How can I prevent swine flu?

#### *Personal health practices*

- Hand washing is the single most effective way to prevent spread of infections.
  - Wash your hands frequently with soap and water. Use waterless sanitizing gel if soap and water are unavailable.
  - Wash your hands after sneezing, coughing, blowing your nose, or using any shared keyboards, phones, or tools.
  - Wash your hands prior to touching your face, mouth, or nose, and before eating.
  - Wash your hands after contact with any ill person.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
- Keep your distance – at least 3 feet – from people who are ill, coughing, or sneezing.
- Drink plenty of fluids. Eat, rest, and exercise in moderation.
- Get a regular flu shot if available. This will not prevent swine flu, but it can decrease the chance of confusing regular seasonal flu with swine flu.
- In a pandemic, avoid crowds and public transport. **Avoid non-urgent travel to areas or countries affected by the disease.**

*Vaccines:* There are no human swine flu vaccines available yet.

*Antiviral medications:* Prescription antiviral drugs can help prevent the disease if you have been exposed and can be used to treat swine flu. The Embassy has a stockpile of antiviral medications that have been shown to be effective against the H1N1 virus and will treat employees and eligible members who are ill with the disease or have been exposed to someone with the disease.

## How can I prepare at home?

Supply your home with the following:

- cough and congestion supplies: tissues, surgical masks, decongestants, cough suppressants, fever medication
- alcohol-based hand cleaners
- food and water to last for 10-15 days or more, as circumstances dictate
- flashlight and batteries
- reliable thermometer for humans
- clean water supply or home purification system
- sufficient cash (if banks, ATMs are unavailable)
- key documents and ID (passport, government issued IDs, health records, health insurance papers)
- medical supplies including prescription medicines
- pet food

## How do I stay healthy at work during a pandemic?

- Wash hands frequently. (*See: How can I prevent swine flu?*)
- Use disinfecting wipes to clean common surfaces (keyboards, phones, door handles) or use gloves.
- Stay at least 3 feet from people who are sneezing or coughing.
- Carry and use masks as directed by your doctor.
- Cancel non-essential and face-to-face meetings.
- Know *who* to contact and *how* (phone, email, hotline) if you have questions about whether you should come to work.
  - High absentee rates are likely, so if you are well and able to work you should contact your supervisor.

## What if I become ill?

If you or a family member becomes ill with these symptoms:

- sudden congestion or trouble breathing *AND*
- fever higher than 100.4° F *AND*
- cough *AND*
- at least 1 of the following: sore throat, joint aches, muscles aches, or weakness
- *Contact your health care provider.* Before going to the clinic or hospital, describe your symptoms and any possible exposure to sick people or animals, or travel to swine flu-infected areas.
- *Notify your supervisor.*
  - *Do NOT go to work* if you develop these symptoms.
  - *Do NOT go to work* if you have been exposed within the past 3 days to someone with flu-like illness.

## What if I become ill at work?

- Call your supervisor (do not meet in person) and report your symptoms.
- Stay away from other people, staff, and visitors.
- Put on a mask if instructed to do so.
- Go home if so instructed.
- Call your health care provider.

## When can I return to work?

- If you have had a flu-like illness, you can usually return to work (after obtaining clearance from your health care provider and employer) if you:
  - have fully recovered
  - OR
  - are on effective antiviral medication
- If you were exposed to someone with flu-like illness, you may return to work after staying home for 3 days (after last exposure), if you have not gotten sick.

## Business planning and swine influenza

Plan now to:

- ensure the ability to maintain essential services
- control the spread of disease in the workplace and the community

- reduce the impact on employees and family members
- enhance a speedy recovery