PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET

Swine Flu

Massachusetts Department of Public Health, 250 Washington Street, Boston, MA 02108

What is swine influenza?

Swine influenza (swine flu) is a respiratory disease of pigs caused by a type of influenza virus. 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 one person to another. In the United States there were 12 cases of swine flu in people from 2006 through 2008. In March and April 2009 there have been many more cases of swine flu than usual in both Mexico and the U.S. and the infections have spread from one person to another.

What are the symptoms of swine flu in people?

Swine flu causes symptoms very similar to seasonal (or human) flu. The most common symptoms of swine flu, like seasonal flu, are fever, cough, and sore throat and can include body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people also have diarrhea and vomiting. There have been some people with swine flu who have been sicker and have even died.

Is swine flu treatable in people?

People sick with any type of flu should make sure to drink enough fluids, get plenty of rest, eat healthy foods, wash hands frequently and stay home to avoid spreading the flu to other people. The kinds of drugs used to treat seasonal flu, called antivirals, can also be used to treat swine flu. There have been a few influenza viruses, including the most recent swine flu, that are resistant to some, but not all, of these drugs. Healthcare providers may recommend that people who are sick or appear to be sick with swine flu receive an antiviral medication.

How would I know if I have swine flu?

If you have symptoms of influenza as described above, and especially if you have recently traveled to an area where there have been human cases of swine flu, contact your healthcare provider who will decide what type of testing and treatment is right for you. To diagnose any kind of flu virus, a swab of the inside of your nose needs to be collected by a doctor. Identification of a swine flu virus requires special laboratory testing.

If you think you might have swine flu and you need to see your health care provider, you should call ahead and 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. If you are experiencing any of these symptoms, stay home to avoid exposing others and contact your healthcare provider; your healthcare provider will decide what type of testing and treatment is right for you. To diagnose any kind of flu virus, a swab of the inside of your nose needs to be collected by a doctor. Identification of a swine flu virus requires special laboratory testing.

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. Avoid holding, hugging, kissing, or shaking hands with anyone who has a cold or the flu. Wash your hands often with soap and warm water, or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer**.** Avoid touching your nose, mouth or eyes. Clean things that are touched often like door handles, telephones, etc. If you get sick with a flu-like illness say home from work and school and avoid contact with others so the virus does not spread.

All people with swine flu who are not hospitalized, and their household and other close contacts, will need to stay at home to prevent spread of illness to other people.

If I have swine flu, can I stay at home?

People with mild or moderate illness can and should be cared for at home to prevent spread. Things people who have swine flu who are cared for at home should do include:

- check with their health care provider about any special care they might need if they are pregnant or have a health condition such as diabetes, heart disease, asthma, or emphysema
- check with their health care provider about whether they should take antiviral medications
- stay home for at least 7 days after onset of illness; or until free of symptoms (including fever) for 24 hours, which ever is longer
- get plenty of rest
- drink clear fluids (such as water, broth, sports drinks, electrolyte beverages for infants) to keep from being dehydrated
- cover coughs and sneezes. Clean hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub often and especially after using tissues and after coughing or sneezing into hands.
- Never cough in the direction of someone else.
- avoid close contact with others – do not go to work or school while ill
- be watchful for emergency warning signs (see below) that might indicate you need to seek medical attention

Get medical care right away if the sick person at home:

- has difficulty breathing or chest pain
- has purple or blue discoloration of the lips
- is vomiting and unable to keep liquids down
- has signs of dehydration such as dizziness when standing, absence of urination, or in infants, a lack of tears when they cry
- has seizures (for example, uncontrolled convulsions) is less responsive than normal or becomes confused

Is there a vaccine for swine flu?

No. Right now there is no vaccine for swine flu. According to CDC, it is unlikely that the vaccine for seasonal flu will prevent swine flu.

Is it safe to cook and eat pork and pork products?

Yes. It is safe to eat properly handled and cooked pork and pork products. Swine flu viruses are not spread by food. You cannot get swine flu from eating pork or pork products.

Why is swine flu important?

Approximately every 20-40 years, a new strain of the flu virus appears which is very different from the ordinary seasonal flu virus. When this happens most people do not have immunity to this new strain of flu virus and it can spread to many people, across the world, over a short period of time. This is called an influenza pandemic. Some people think that swine flu viruses might play a role in the start of the next pandemic.

For more information about seasonal flu, pandemic flu, avian flu and swine flu, please visit the websites listed below or contact the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Division of Epidemiology and Immunization at 617-983-6800.

- **Massachusetts Department of Public Health website on influenza**
  http://www.mass.gov/dph/flu
- **Center for Disease Control (CDC) websites on swine flu**
  http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/

April 27, 2009