



Fact Sheet on H1N1 Influenza

What is swine influenza?

Swine influenza, or “swine flu”, is a highly contagious acute respiratory disease of pigs, caused by one of several swine influenza A viruses. Outbreaks in pigs occur year round, with an increased incidence in the fall and winter in temperate zones. Many countries routinely vaccinate swine populations against swine influenza.

Swine influenza viruses are most commonly of the H1N1 subtype, but other subtypes are also circulating in pigs (e.g., H1N2, H3N1, H3N2). Pigs can also be infected with avian influenza viruses and human seasonal influenza viruses as well as swine influenza viruses. The H3N2 swine virus was thought to have been originally introduced into pigs by humans. Sometimes pigs can be infected with more than one virus type at a time, which can allow the genes from these viruses to mix. Although swine influenza viruses are normally species specific and only infect pigs, they do sometimes cross the species barrier to cause disease in humans.

Is this a new kind of swine flu?

Yes. It is our current understanding that the virus in these latest cases is a never-before-seen mixture of viruses typical among pigs, birds and humans. The influenza A H1N1 virus contains DNA typical to avian, swine and human viruses, including elements from European and Asian swine viruses. Although it's called swine flu, this new strain has never been seen in pigs or humans.

What are the implications for human health?

Outbreaks and sporadic human infection with swine influenza have been occasionally reported. Generally clinical symptoms are similar to seasonal influenza but reported clinical presentation ranges broadly from asymptomatic infection to severe pneumonia resulting in death. Since typical clinical presentation of swine influenza infection in humans resembles seasonal influenza and other acute upper respiratory tract infections, most of the cases have been detected by chance through seasonal influenza surveillance. Mild or asymptomatic cases may have escaped from recognition; therefore the true extent of this disease among humans is unknown.

Does a vaccine exist?

Pigs in North America are routinely vaccinated for swine flu, but no vaccine exists for humans. In any case, the flu virus evolves quickly, meaning that vaccines are

soon obsolete. Health officials say there is no suggestion that the vaccine prepared for seasonal flu will protect against swine flu.

While people who are given the seasonal flu vaccine will probably be not protected against swine flu, it may prevent them from getting the seasonal flu. If they are then infected with swine flu, that reduces the possibility of the two flus mixing in that person to create a potential pandemic strain.

How can I protect myself from getting swine influenza from infected people?

In the past, human infection with swine influenza was generally mild but is known to have caused severe illness such as pneumonia. For the current outbreaks in the United States, Canada and Mexico however, the clinical pictures have been different. None of the confirmed cases in the United States or Canada have had the severe form of the disease and the patients recovered from illness without requiring medical care. In Mexico, some patients reportedly had the severe form of the disease.

To protect yourself, practice general preventive measures for influenza:

- Avoid close contact with people who appear unwell and who have fever and cough.
- Wash your hands with soap and water frequently and thoroughly.
- Practice good health habits including adequate sleep, eating nutritious food, and keeping physically active.

Is it safe to eat pork and pork products?

Yes. Proper cooking of pork products would kill any viruses. Make sure pork is cooked through, not pink in the middle. Use a food thermometer to confirm pork has been heated through to 71 degrees Celsius (160 degrees Fahrenheit).

(**Sources:** World Health Organization, Public Health Agency of Canada and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 1600 Clifton Rd. Atlanta, Georgia, USA)