

H1N1 Swine Influenza and You

Questions and Answers | May 5, 2009 | Current as of 10:30 am



What is H1N1 swine flu?

H1N1 swine Influenza (swine flu) is a respiratory disease of pigs caused by type A influenza viruses that causes regular outbreaks in pigs. People do not normally get H1N1 swine flu, but human infections can and do happen. H1N1 swine flu viruses have been reported to spread from person-to-person.

Are there human infections with H1N1 swine flu in the U.S.?

In late March and early April 2009, cases of human infection with H1N1 swine influenza A viruses were first reported in Southern California and near San Antonio, Texas. Other U.S. states have reported cases of H1N1 swine flu infection in humans and cases have been reported internationally as well. Updated case information about the situation in the U.S. is at <http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu>. CDC and local and state health agencies are working together to investigate this situation.

Is this H1N1 swine flu virus contagious?

CDC has determined that this H1N1 swine influenza A (H1N1) virus is contagious and is spreading from human to human. However, at this time, it is not known how easily the virus spreads between people.

What are the signs and symptoms of H1N1 swine flu in people?

The symptoms of H1N1 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 H1N1 swine flu. Like seasonal flu, H1N1 swine flu may cause a worsening of underlying chronic medical conditions.

How does H1N1 swine flu spread?

Spread of this H1N1 swine influenza A (H1N1) virus is thought to be happening in the same way that seasonal flu spreads. Flu viruses are spread mainly from person to person through coughing or sneezing

of people with influenza. Sometimes people may become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose.

Infected people may be able to infect others beginning 1 day before symptoms develop and up to 7 days after becoming sick. That means that you may be able to pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick. Children, especially younger children, might be contagious for longer periods.

What should I do to keep from getting the flu?

First and most important: wash your hands. Try to stay in good general health. Get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids, and eat nutritious food. Wash your hands after touching surfaces that may be contaminated with the flu virus. Avoid close contact with people who are sick.

Are there medicines to treat H1N1 swine flu?

Yes. CDC recommends the use of oseltamivir or zanamivir for the treatment and/or prevention of infection with these H1N1 swine influenza viruses. If you get sick, these drugs can make your illness milder and make you feel better faster. They may also prevent serious flu complications. For treatment, these medications work best if started within 2 days of having symptoms.

How long can viruses live outside the body?

We know that some viruses and bacteria can live 2 hours or longer on surfaces like tables, handrails, doorknobs, and desks. Frequent handwashing will help you reduce the chance of getting contamination from these common surfaces.

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What can I do to protect myself from getting sick?

There is no vaccine available right now to protect against H1N1 swine flu. 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.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- If you get sick with influenza, SRHD recommends that you stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.

What is the best way to keep from spreading the virus through coughing or sneezing?

If you are sick, limit your contact with other people as much as possible. Do not go to work or school if ill. Cover your cough – cough into your elbow or shoulder, not your hand, or cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing and put your used tissue in a waste basket. Cover your cough or sneeze if you do not have a tissue. Then, clean your hands, and do so every time you cough or sneeze. It may prevent those around you from getting sick.

What is the best technique for washing my hands to avoid getting the flu?

Washing your hands often will help protect you from germs. Wash your hands -- with soap and warm water -- for 15 to 20 seconds. When soap and water are not available, alcohol-based disposable hand wipes or gel sanitizers may be used. If using gel, rub your hands until the gel is dry. The gel doesn't need water to work; the alcohol in it kills the germs on your hands.

What should I do if I get sick?

If you live in an area where H1N1 swine influenza cases have been identified and become ill with influenza-like symptoms, including fever, body aches, runny nose, sore

throat, nausea, or vomiting or diarrhea, you may want to contact a health care provider. Your health care provider will determine whether influenza testing or treatment is needed.

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.

Can I get H1N1 swine influenza from eating or preparing pork?

No. H1N1 swine influenza viruses are not spread by food. You cannot get H1N1 swine influenza from eating pork or pork products. Eating properly handled and cooked pork products is safe.

For more information:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
www.cdc.gov/swineflu

CDC 24 Hour Hotline: 800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636)
TTY: (888) 232-6348

Washington State Department of Health recorded
information line: 1 (888) 703-4364

Spokane Regional Health District (SRHD)
www.srhd.org

SRHD H1N1 swine flu information hotline:
(509) 324-1519 TDD: (509) 324-1464