



Frequently Asked Questions About Swine Influenza

What is swine influenza?

Swine Influenza (swine flu) is a respiratory disease of pigs caused by some influenza viruses. Rarely, a type of flu virus with some genetic material from pigs develops that can also cause disease in humans.

Can humans catch swine flu?

Yes, in past cases, infection was due to close exposure to pigs. But the cases we are seeing now are not from direct human contact with pigs. These cases appear to be passed directly from person-to-person through coughing or sneezing, just like regular seasonal flu. You cannot catch swine flu from eating pork or pork products.

Why are we just hearing about this type of influenza now?

This type of influenza is what's known as a "novel," or new strain. It is not unusual for public health to discover a new strain of influenza. This is why public health laboratories and public health staff, including the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, are constantly monitoring the health of the population to quickly detect, monitor and treat new and emerging diseases.

I got a flu vaccine for this season. Will this protect me from swine flu?

Experts do not believe that this season's influenza vaccine will protect against swine flu. However, because flu season is coming to an end, the spread of influenza from person-to-person is becoming less likely.

To protect against swine flu and other infectious illnesses, Public Health recommends that individuals continue to practice good hygiene throughout the year. This includes frequent hand washing, especially after using the restroom and before eating, covering your nose and mouth when you cough or sneeze, avoiding touching your hands to your eyes, nose and mouth, and staying home when sick. It is also strongly recommended that all individuals receive the flu vaccine every fall, in order to protect against other strains of influenza.

What are the symptoms of swine flu in humans?

The symptoms of swine flu in people are the same as symptoms of regular seasonal influenza and include fever, lethargy, sore throat, dry cough, muscle aches, and lack of appetite. Symptoms may also include runny nose, sore throat and, less commonly, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea. The recent reports of swine flu in the United States suggests that overall, the cases are mild to moderate in severity. However, preliminary reports from Mexico of flu caused by this identical virus indicate that more severe cases are common.

How do I know if I have swine flu?

You cannot tell just by the symptoms, as they are similar to regular seasonal influenza. A doctor will need to collect a respiratory specimen within the first 4 to 5 days of illness. If swine flu is



suspected, this specimen will then be sent to the LA County Department of Public Health Laboratory for testing. In the meantime, individuals who are sick should care for themselves at home, in the same way they would with a regular bout of influenza.

How is swine flu treated?

Swine flu is treated in the same way as regular flu – with good hygiene practices and plenty of rest at home, away from work or school. This type of flu may be treated with an antiviral medication if it is started early. However, nobody should take this or any other prescription medication without first talking to their doctor.

Why are all of the cases so far mostly among children?

Influenza is not officially confirmed without laboratory testing of specimens. These cases of swine flu happen to have been confirmed mostly in children. It is expected that both children and adults would be at equal risk of catching swine flu, and it appears that both children and adults have equal, high chances of recovery. Both children and adults are urged to practice good hygiene habits, such as hand washing, to avoid catching any kind of illness or spreading illness to others. Also, it is important that children who are sick stay home from school to prevent the spread of illness.

Is swine flu like avian flu? Do I need to wear a face mask or avoid travel?

Unless you are sick, you do not need to wear a face mask or avoid travel. It is recommended that those who are sick avoid travel in order to recover and to avoid passing the illness on to others. Face masks for the general public in order to reduce the chance of catching influenza are not necessary.

What is Public Health doing about this?

Public Health is actively working with the California Department of Public Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to detect cases of swine flu that may occur in Los Angeles County. It is also working with emergency rooms, physicians, hospitals, and schools to carefully monitor for any signs of swine flu in LA County.

Want more information?

For more information and updates, you can check the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at www.cdc.gov/flu/swine.