

POSTED
April 27, 2009
5:45 p.m.



SMH Following Recommended Swine Flu Precautions

As a result of the international outbreak of swine flu, Speare Memorial Hospital, under the guidance of the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), is taking precautionary steps to support the state's active surveillance.

As of 4 p.m. today there were no human cases of swine flu in New Hampshire or New England, according to DHHS. However, the state has established a public inquiry line for people to call between 8 a.m. – 8 p.m. with questions about the outbreak, possible symptoms and travel information: 1-888-330-6764. Other information can be found online at http://www.dhhs.state.nh.us/DHHS/DHHS_SITE/default.htm.

According to Ann Graves, SMH's director of infection prevention, swine flu symptoms are much the same as seasonal flu, including fever, sore throat, cough, stuffy nose, chills and overall aches and fatigue. People experiencing these symptoms and have recently traveled to areas where the flu is known to be present (Mexico, California, Texas, Kansas, New York), or been in close contact with someone who recently traveled to infected areas, and/or has a confirmed case of the flu, are instructed to contact their healthcare provider.

PREVENTING THE SPREAD OF INFECTION

There are three things everyone can do to help prevent the spread of infection:

- **Wash Your Hands!** Use soap and warm water, rub together vigorously for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not readily available, use alcohol-based hand sanitizers. Always wash hands before touching/eating food, after using the bathroom, taking out the trash, changing a diaper, handling money or playing with a pet.
- **Cover Your Cough/Sneeze.** Many diseases are spread through droplets from coughs and sneezes. Use a tissue and be sure to throw away immediately and wash hands. No tissue available, sneeze/cough into the crook of your elbow, not your hand.
- **Avoid Close Contact.** If you are sick with flu-like symptoms stay away from others. Do not go to school or work. If you need medical treatment, be sure to ask your provider for a mask so you can avoid affecting other people.

Swine Influenza

What is Swine Influenza?

Swine Influenza (swine flu) is a highly contagious acute respiratory disease of pigs caused by type A influenza virus that regularly causes outbreaks of influenza in pigs. Morbidity tends to be high and mortality low in pigs.

Can humans catch swine flu?

Swine flu viruses do not normally infect humans. However, sporadic human infections with swine flu have occurred. Most commonly, these cases occur in people with direct exposure to pigs (e.g. children near pigs at a fair or workers in the swine industry). In addition, there have been cases of human-to-human spread of swine flu.

What are the symptoms of swine flu in humans?

The symptoms of swine flu in people are similar to the symptoms of regular human seasonal influenza and include fever, lethargy, lack of appetite, and coughing. Some people with swine flu have also reported having a runny nose, sore throat, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea.

How does swine flu spread?

Influenza viruses can be directly transmitted from pigs to people and from people to pigs. Human infection with flu viruses from pigs are most likely to occur when people are in close proximity to infected pigs, such as in pig barns and livestock exhibits housing pigs at fairs. Human-to-human transmission of swine flu can also occur. This is thought to occur in the same way as seasonal flu occurs in people, which is mainly person to person

transmission through coughing or sneezing of people infected with the influenza virus. People can become infected when they touch surfaces and then touching their mouth or nose.

How long is someone with swine flu infectious to others?

People with swine influenza virus infection should be considered potentially contagious one day before disease onset and as long as they are symptomatic and possible for up to 7 days following the onset of illness. Children, especially younger children, might be contagious for longer periods.

Can people catch swine flu from eating pork?

No. Swine influenza viruses are not transmitted by food. You can not get swine influenza from eating pork or pork products. Eating properly handled and cooked pork and pork products is safe. Cooking pork to an internal temperature of 160°F kills the swine flu virus as it does other bacteria and viruses.

How serious is swine flu infection?

Like seasonal flu, swine flu in people can vary in severity from mild to severe. Between 2005 until January 2009, 12 human cases of swine flu were detected in the U.S. with no deaths occurring. However, swine flu infection can be very serious. In September 1988, a previously healthy 32-year-old pregnant woman in Wisconsin was hospitalized for pneumonia after being infected with swine flu and died 8 days later. A swine flu outbreak at Fort Dix, New Jersey occurred in 1976 that caused more than 200 cases with serious illness in several people and one death.

What medications are available to treat swine flu infections in humans?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends the use of oseltamivir or zanamivir for the treatment and/or prevention of infection with swine influenza viruses. Antiviral drugs are prescription medicines (pills, liquid or an inhaler) that fight against the flu by keeping flu viruses from reproducing in your body. If you get sick, antiviral drugs can make your illness milder and make you feel better faster. They may also prevent serious flu complications.

How can human infections with swine influenza be diagnosed?

To diagnose swine influenza A infection, a respiratory specimen would generally need to be collected within the first 4 to 5 days of illness (when an infected person is most likely to be shedding virus). However, some persons, especially children, may shed virus for 10 days or longer. Identification as a swine flu influenza A virus requires sending the specimen to CDC for laboratory testing.

What can I do to protect myself from getting sick?

While there is no vaccine currently available to protect against swine flu, there are a number of daily actions you can take to help prevent the spread of germs that cause respiratory illnesses like influenza:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people
- Avoid sharing eating utensils.
- If you get sick with influenza, stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.

For specific concerns or questions about Swine Influenza, call the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services, Bureau of Communicable Disease Control at 603-271-4496 or 800-852-3345 x4496. For further information, refer to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at www.cdc.gov, the World Health Organization website at www.who.org or the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services website at www.dhhs.state.nh.us.