

What is swine flu (H1N1)?

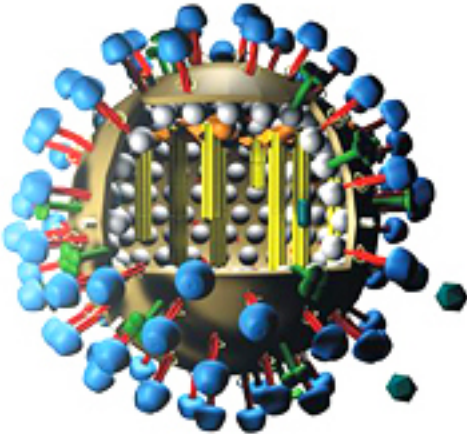


Illustration of the H1N1 virus

Swine flu (also known as H1N1 influenza) is a respiratory illness that is normally found in pigs, but can occasionally be found in humans. The particular strain of swine flu circulating in the United States right now can be passed from person to person. □

What are the symptoms of swine flu in humans?

The symptoms of swine flu in most people are similar to the symptoms of a typical seasonal flu and include fever, exhaustion, sore throat and coughing. Some people with swine flu have also reported runny nose, upset stomach, vomiting and diarrhea.

What can I do to avoid getting swine flu?

Swine flu can be prevented by taking the same precautions used to avoid seasonal flu. There are several things you can do to help yourself and others stay healthy:

- **Wash your hands.**

Washing your hands often kills germs and stops them from spreading. You need to ensure that you wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Alcohol-based hand cleaners also work well.

- **Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.**

Germs often spread when a person touches something contaminated and then touches his or her eyes, nose or mouth. This allows germs to enter the body.

- **Avoid close contact.**

Avoid close contact with people who are sick. When you are sick, keep your distance from others to protect them from getting sick, too.

- **Stay home when you are sick.**

Stay home from work and school when you are sick. You will help prevent others from getting sick.

- **Cover your mouth and nose.**

Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. It may prevent others around you from getting sick. Another option is to sneeze or cough into your sleeve, rather than your hand.

- **Try to stay in good health.**

Exercise, get plenty of sleep, manage your stress, drink lots of fluids and eat healthy foods.

How serious is swine flu? Should I be concerned?

Most of the people in our region and in the United States who have had H1N1 influenza have experienced only mild symptoms. However, because this is a new strain and because it is believed to spread fairly easily, health officials are watching cases closely to ensure that there are no changes in the virus and that people do not get sicker. There is cause for concern, but not alarm. We want everyone to use precautions to help prevent the spread of this virus in the community, just as they would with any flu. Washing your hands frequently, staying home if you are sick, and practicing good hygiene in general will help prevent swine flu in your community.

How does swine flu spread?

This particular strain of swine flu can be passed from one person to another through close contact such as coughing and sneezing. People may become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their eyes, mouth or nose. Practicing good hygiene, such as covering your mouth when you cough, frequently washing your hands and staying home when you are sick, can help prevent the spread of any flu, including swine flu.

What surfaces are most likely to be sources of contamination?

Germ can be spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose, or mouth. Droplets from the cough or sneeze of an infected person move through the air. Germs can be spread when a person touches respiratory droplets from another person on a surface like a desk and then touches their own eyes, mouth or nose before washing their hands.

Are there any cases in New Orleans?

New Orleans has had many confirmed cases of H1N1 virus infection and there will be many more. The virus has produced mostly mild symptoms. All patients with Influenza A will not be tested to determine whether or not the case is H1N1. Confirmatory tests are only presently being done on patients admitted to the hospital and those with immunosuppression.

What will happen if there are many cases on the Dillard University campus?

The CDC has guidelines to follow if there are many cases in a small community or cluster. School closure is not mandatory, but if such action is deemed necessary, it is important that the infected students stay home from school, and limit out of home activities during the closure period. Students should avoid gathering in groups in malls, theaters, or other places where they will have close contact. It is also recommended that they not participate in sports or extra-curricular activities until the school is re-opened.

What should I do if I think I have swine flu?

If you are sick, you should stay home and avoid contact with other people as much as possible so that you don't spread your illness to others. If you live in one of the dormitories on campus, you should report to the Health and Wellness Center on campus. So far, most cases of swine flu in the United States are mild. Most people with the flu can be treated at home with over-the-counter medication, rest, and extra fluids. But if you have a high fever, severe symptoms or symptoms that persist, you should consult with the Wellness Center.

If you come down with flu-like symptoms and you have an underlying medical condition, like a respiratory condition or immune disorder, contact the Wellness Center.

If you are sick and start experiencing any of the following warning signs, contact the Wellness Center so that the staff can seek emergency medical care for you.

In adults, emergency warning signs that require urgent medical attention include:

- **Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath**
- **Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen**
- **Sudden dizziness**
- **Confusion**
- **Severe or persistent vomiting**

Should I ask to be tested for swine flu?

No, not everyone who has the flu should be tested for swine flu--only those admitted or those that are seriously ill.

If someone has swine flu, should they be kept from school or work?

If someone has flu symptoms, they should stay home and out of class until they no longer have symptoms. After illness onset, it usually takes a minimum of seven days for an infected person to cease being contagious; after seven days, most infected people are unlikely to spread infection to anyone else. Individuals who have tested "probable" or "confirmed" for the swine flu virus (H1N1), or have been directly exposed to such cases, should remain home for 10 days from the date the sickness began.

How do humans catch swine flu?

It appears that this particular strain of swine flu can pass from person to person through close contact such as coughing and sneezing. The virus can also live on surfaces for short periods of time.

How common is swine flu infection in humans?

Before this outbreak, CDC received reports of approximately one human swine influenza virus infection every one to two years in the U.S. However, from December 2005 to February 2009, 12 cases of humans infected with swine influenza were reported.

What is Orleans Parish doing right now about swine flu?

Public Health officials are working closely with local hospitals and health care providers to conduct surveillance and control activities. We are also working with other local, state and school officials to keep them informed about the situation.

Healthcare providers are being instructed to watch for influenza-like illnesses to detect any new cases.

As appropriate, healthcare providers are testing certain individuals for swine flu. The communicable disease staff for the Office of Public Health is conducting investigations to determine ways to prevent further spread of the virus.

How can swine influenza be diagnosed in humans?

To diagnose swine influenza, a swab of the nose or throat is collected within the first four to five days of illness (when an infected person is most likely to be shedding virus). The swab is tested in a special laboratory for the presence of the virus.

What medications are available to treat swine flu (H1N1) infections in humans?

There are four different antiviral drugs licensed for use in the U.S. for the treatment of influenza. The current swine flu has been found to be susceptible to two of them. If you are diagnosed with swine flu, your healthcare provider will determine the necessity of drug therapy. Antiviral treatment is not recommended for everyone. Over the counter medications can offer relief of symptoms for most people.

Should I ask for Tami flu if I have the flu?

Consult with your doctor about that. Tami flu and other antiviral drugs have been shown to lessen effects of flu. However, they are not recommended for those with only mild symptoms.

Is there a swine flu (H1N1) vaccine for people?

At this time there is not a vaccine for this strain of the swine flu (H1N1). There will most likely be a commercially available vaccine in late October.

Will the regular, seasonal flu vaccine protect me?

Probably not. There is some evidence that there may be slight cross-protection from this year's regular seasonal flu vaccine against the swine flu virus. However, because there will soon be a vaccine for the H1N1 virus, it is recommended that people get both vaccines.

Can I get swine flu from eating pork?

No, you cannot get swine flu from eating properly cooked pork or pork products.

Can my pets or animals get swine flu?

According to the American Veterinarian Medical Association, to date, there is no evidence that pets are susceptible to this new strain of influenza; it appears to be transmitted solely from person to person.

Is swine flu different from bird flu?

Yes. They are very different viruses.

Should I wear a mask?

At this time, it is not necessary to wear a mask in public places or in large groups.

For more information:

- Visit the CDC website at <http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu>
- Call the CDC information line at 1-800-CDC-Info (1-800-232-4636)

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