

Influenza A, H1N1 (Swine Flu)

Lately, the media has been covering the outbreak of a swine type A influenza (H1N1) in the United States. The source of the new infection appears to be Mexico. Fortunately, the few cases identified in the U.S. appear to be mild. This fact sheet provides information on the new swine influenza and tips for reducing or preventing transmission.

What Is the new Swine Flu?

Ordinary swine influenza is a respiratory infection caused by type A influenza viruses that regularly cause outbreaks among pigs. People do not normally contract swine flu. However, this new or novel swine flu Type A virus (H1N1) appears to be a combination of pig, avian and human Type A influenza viruses.

Symptoms

Symptoms of the new swine flu are like those of seasonal human flu including fever, upper respiratory symptoms, cough, sore throat, body aches, chills and fatigue. Unlike seasonal flu however, some patients have experienced nausea and gastro-intestinal symptoms (cramping, diarrhea). Although the cases in Mexico appear to be severe, the recently identified cases in the U.S. have been mild.

High-Risk Groups

Seasonal influenza is generally a challenge for the very young and the old. These groups have higher rates of complications such as pneumonia. The new swine influenza, however, appears to disproportionately attack young adults. The CDC has not yet identified persons at high risk in the U.S. for complications of swine influenza A (H1N1).

Transmission

Human-to-human spread occurs in the same manner as seasonal influenza. Influenza is spread through the droplets and aerosols created by coughing or sneezing. The virus can also survive on objects (moist tissues) and surfaces for up to eight hours. People may become infected by touching contaminated objects and then inadvertently touching their mouths or noses.

Infectious Period

An infected person may be infectious one day before symptoms begin and up to seven days after the onset of the illness. Persons at close contact (within six feet) with a suspected or confirmed case are known to be at high risk of infection. Some investigators believe that the virus can travel much farther in the aerosols of sneezes or coughs.

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Treatment

There is currently no vaccine for the new swine influenza. The CDC believes that two antiviral drugs, Tamiflu and Relenza, are effective against the new virus. However, these drugs must be administered early on in the course of the illness to be effective. Treatment is recommended for five days. The CDC also recommends a similar treatment regimen (7 days) for non-symptomatic persons with close contact to confirmed or suspected cases especially those **who are at high risk for complications of influenza (certain chronic medical conditions)**. Consult your physician if you believe that you meet the criteria.

Methods to reduce exposure to swine influenza

- Frequent hand washing; alcohol gel when hand washing is not feasible.
- Social “distancing” –reducing normal social customs such as hand-shaking.
- Avoidance of touching our faces (nose, eyes and mouth areas).
- Getting sleep and eating nutritious meals (i.e., habits that strengthen the immune system).
- Avoiding crowded areas or airplane travel especially to outbreak areas such as Mexico.

If you begin to experience acute respiratory symptoms as described below, you should probably stay at home until the symptoms subside (up to seven days). However if you have a common cold, you may be able to go to work or school.

Swine Flu vs. the Common Cold: There is a Difference

Symptom	Influenza	Common Cold
Fever	Usual sudden onset 99°-101° and lasts 3-4 days	Rare
Headache	Usual and can be severe	Rare
Aches and Pains	Usual and can be severe	Rare
Fatigue and Weakness	Usual and can last 2-3 weeks or more after the acute illness	Sometimes, but mild
Debilitating fatigue	Usual, early onset can be severe	Rare
Nausea, vomiting, diarrhea	Reported in some patients	Rare
Watering of the eyes	Rare	Usual

Symptom	Influenza	Common Cold
Runny, stuffy nose	Rare	Usual
Sneezing	Rare in early stages	Usual
Sore Throat	Usual	Usual
Chest discomfort	Usual and can be severe	Sometimes but mild to moderate
Complications	Respiratory failure, secondary bacterial infections (pneumonia), worsening of chronic conditions, life threatening	Congestion or ear ache

Contact the AFT Health and Safety Program at 800/238-1133, ext. 5677, for updates and more information.