



Department of Health & Human Services
Public Health Division

Swine Flu: Frequently Asked Questions

May 4, 2009

Because this is a new virus, the information in this document may change as we learn more about this new virus. Watch for updated information from Colusa Public Health and the California Department of Public Health (CDPH).

What is swine flu?

Swine flu usually occurs in pigs. Now a new type of swine flu is causing illness in people.

Are people in California sick with swine flu?

Yes, there are cases of swine flu in people in California, other U.S. states, Mexico and throughout the world. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC), with local and state health departments, are responding to the situation.

Is this swine flu virus contagious?

Yes. Swine flu is contagious and is spreading from human to human. At this time, it is not known how easily the virus spreads between people.

What are the signs and symptoms of swine flu?

The symptoms of swine flu are like the symptoms of regular flu:

- Fever
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Body aches and headache
- Chills
- Fatigue
- Diarrhea and vomiting (less common)

Like seasonal flu, swine flu may worsen chronic medical conditions (such as diabetes, heart disease, and lung disease). So far, U.S. cases of swine flu have generally been mild. There have been cases of more serious swine flu illness in Mexico. The reason for this difference is not yet understood.

How do you catch swine flu?

Swine flu spreads from one person to another by coughing or sneezing, just like regular seasonal flu. Sometimes people may get the flu by touching surfaces with flu viruses on them, and then touching their eyes, mouth, or nose without washing their hands.

When can a person spread swine flu to others?

People with swine flu can spread it to others beginning 1 day before symptoms start and up to 7 days after becoming sick. This means that you can spread the flu to someone



else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick. Children, especially younger children, may spread flu germs for longer periods.

What can I do to protect myself and my family from getting sick?

There is no vaccine right now to protect against swine flu. You can take these everyday steps to stay healthy:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue or sleeve when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it and wash your hands.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Avoid close contact with sick people.
- If you get sick with the flu, stay away from other people. Stay home from work and school.

What is the best way to wash my hands?

Frequently washing your hands protects you from all kinds of germs. Wash your hands with soap and warm water for 15 to 20 seconds. Soap and water are best. If they are not available, alcohol-based hand cleaners may be used instead.

What should I do if I get sick?

If you are sick, you should stay away from other people as much as you can to keep from spreading your illness. **Stay home!**

When should I see a doctor?

If you become ill with flu symptoms (fever, cough, sore throat, etc.), contact your health care provider for advice. Your health care provider will determine whether you need to be seen. If you do not have health insurance or a regular doctor, you may contact your local public health department for referral information.

When should I get medical care right away?

Adults should get emergency medical care right away if they have:

- Trouble breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or continuing vomiting

Children should be taken to emergency medical care right away if they have:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Not waking up or not interacting
- Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held



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- Flu symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough
- Fever with a rash

Are there medicines to treat swine flu?

Yes. The prescription antiviral medicines oseltamivir (Tamiflu) or zanamivir (Relenza) can be used to treat severe swine flu. Mild illness usually does not require antiviral medication. Most people recover from swine flu without antiviral medications or going to the hospital.

If you get very sick, these drugs can make your illness milder and make you feel better faster. They may also prevent serious flu complications for people with chronic medical conditions, pregnant women, people over 65 years, and children under 5 years old. They work best if started soon after getting sick (within 2 days of start of symptoms).

Is there a vaccine to protect people from swine flu?

Not yet. The "flu shot" you may have gotten this season does not appear to protect people from swine flu. Effective vaccines may be developed in the future.

How safe is it to travel?

CDC has issued an alert to avoid nonessential travel to Mexico. Travel notices are available on the CDC Swine Flu web page at <http://wwwn.cdc.gov/travel/>. At this time, there are no restrictions for travel within the U.S.

Can I get swine flu from eating or preparing pork, bacon, and ham?

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

For further information, please see the following websites or call Colusa County Department of Public Health at 530-458-0380.

Colusa County Department of Health and Human Services:

<http://www.colusacountydhhs.org>

California Department of Public Health:

<http://www.cdph.ca.gov/HealthInfo/news/Pages/SwineFluLndingPg042409.aspx>

This document was adapted from an information bulletin from the City of Berkeley Health and Human Services, Public Health Division.