

Swine flu

Swine flu, also known as swine influenza or influenza A (H1N1) virus, is a contagious respiratory disease. Symptoms of swine flu include a fever (temperature over 38°C), cough, sore throat, aches and tiredness.

Swine flu is usually found in pigs. Humans are not usually infected by the swine flu virus but it does happen. A new strain of the swine flu virus that affects humans, also called H1N1 influenza, was recently identified. It is thought to have started in Mexico.

Symptoms

Swine flu sometimes doesn't cause any symptoms in humans. It usually causes a short-term illness similar to seasonal flu. Symptoms of swine flu may include:

- High temperature
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Body aches
- Running nose
- Headache
- Chills
- Fatigue
- Sometimes, diarrhoea and vomiting.

Stay home if you have flu-like symptoms

If you have flu-like symptoms you should stay at home and not attend work or school. Drink plenty of fluids and rest.

Severe pneumonia is a dangerous complication

Swine flu, like human or seasonal flu, can make underlying medical conditions worse. A potentially life-threatening complication of swine flu is pneumonia (a type of lung infection). Some of the symptoms of pneumonia may include:

- Fever
- General malaise (feeling tired and unwell)
- Rapid breathing
- Breathing difficulties
- Cough
- Chest pain
- Loss of appetite
- Abdominal pain
- Headache
- Blue coloured skin around the mouth (cyanosis) caused by lack of oxygen.

How the swine flu virus is spread

The ways in which swine flu can spread include:

- Pig farmers can be infected directly from infected pigs – for example, by handling sick pigs and not washing their hands.
- A person infected with swine flu is contagious from the day before they develop symptoms to at least seven days after they develop symptoms. It is thought that young children may be infectious for longer.
- A person caring for someone sick with the swine flu can become infected from inhaling infected sneeze or cough droplets. This is known as direct contact.

- The swine flu virus can live for about two hours outside of the body. Infection can occur when a person touches a contaminated object (such as a dirty tissue) and then touches his or her own nose, eyes or mouth. This is known as indirect contact.
- In some cases, swine flu is asymptomatic, which means the infected person feels fine and has no symptoms. However, they can still infect other people.

Swine flu is not spread by eating pork

The swine flu virus is not spread through food products. It is safe to eat pork, bacon and ham. The World Health Organization advises that swine influenza has not been shown to be transmissible to people through eating pork and pork meat products, even in those countries where there has been an outbreak of swine flu.

Eating properly handled and cooked pork and other pork products is safe. Cooking pork to temperatures of 70°C (160°F) kills the influenza virus.

Diagnosis

If your doctor suspects you may have swine flu, the medical staff will wear gloves and masks and will isolate you from other patients to reduce the risk of passing the virus on to other people.

Diagnosis methods may include:

- Medical history
- Travel history
- Physical examination
- Nose and throat swabs (for laboratory analysis).

Treatment

There are no drugs specific to swine flu, although a vaccine is now available in Australia. Treatment options may include:

- Various antiviral medications such as Tamiflu and Relenza. These may help to reduce the symptoms and speed recovery.
- Resting and drinking plenty of fluids.
- Avoiding public places to reduce the risk of transmission. Staying home from school or work until you are completely recovered.
- Taking steps to reduce the risk of transmission to others in your household – for example, disposing of your own dirty tissues and washing your hands regularly, particularly after coughing or sneezing. In particular, avoid contact with children or the elderly, who tend to be more vulnerable to infectious diseases.

Reduce your risk of infection

Good hygiene is very important and can reduce your risk of getting the flu or passing it onto other people. Remember to:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the garbage bin after you use it.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hands cleaners are also effective.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread that way.
- Avoid public places and close contact with others if you have the flu.
- Look after yourself and don't get run down. Get plenty of sleep and eat a healthy diet.
- Avoid travelling to areas where outbreaks have occurred.
- Avoid sick pigs or sick people if possible.
- Consider having the swine flu vaccination.

Swine flu vaccine available in Australia

Australia's swine flu vaccination program aims to protect those who are most at risk of exposure to the H1N1 Influenza 09 (swine flu) virus. This includes health care workers and people who are more vulnerable to severe health complications from swine flu. This is why the most vulnerable people in our community are encouraged to get the swine flu vaccine first. These include:

- Pregnant women
- People with chronic health conditions such as asthma, heart and lung disease, cancer, diabetes, kidney disease, neurological disease and people with suppressed immune systems

- People with moderate to severe obesity (BMI of 35+)
- Health care workers
- Indigenous people
- Parents and guardians of infants under six months old.

The vaccine is also available for anyone else who wishes to protect themselves from swine flu, including healthy people. Contact your doctor or immunisation provider to make an appointment. The vaccine is free of charge, although your provider may charge you a service fee.

For more information about the Swine flu vaccine program, call 180 2007 or visit the Victorian Government Human Swine Flu website.

Where to get help

- **Swine Influenza Hotline and Vaccine Program** Tel. 180 2007 or visit the Victorian Health Emergency Website <http://humanswineflu.health.vic.gov.au>
- **Your doctor (GP)** – for medical advice if you have a flu-like illness (fever, cough and fatigue)
- **Nurse-on-Call** Tel. 1300 606 024 – for expert health information and advice (24 hours, 7 days)
- **Your local hospital** – only if you are seriously unwell with flu-like symptoms
- **Smartraveller** – for travel advice

Things to remember

- Australia has very good communicable disease surveillance and control systems in place to detect and respond to outbreaks of illness.
- Swine flu sometimes doesn't cause any symptoms. It usually causes a short-term illness similar to seasonal flu.
- Good hygiene is very important and can reduce your risk of getting swine flu or passing it on to other people.
- A vaccine is available in Australia for everyone who wants it; those at high risk are encouraged to get vaccinated first.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

Department of Health - Communicable Disease Prevention and Control Unit

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