

Swine Flu

We know people are concerned about the swine flu situation and we share that concern. At this early stage of this outbreak, there is a lot of uncertainty and the situation remains very fluid.

It is the role of the Santa Clara County Public Health Department to inform the public, medical community and other local agencies about a potential health emergency, and the current outbreak of swine flu poses a potential risk to the residents of this community.

For current information regarding U.S. human cases of swine flu infection, visit the CDC website at <http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/investigation.htm>. CDC, state and local health agencies are working together to investigate this issue.

Why is there a concern?

These cases of swine flu in humans raise concerns since it is a new flu virus for which people have little or no immunity. Since this is a new flu virus there is no vaccine.

Swine flu virus regularly causes outbreaks in pigs but rarely affects humans. Occasionally there have been human infections of swine flu and there have been documented cases of a person spreading swine flu to others.

In this current situation, there is evidence of person-to-person transmission. If this new flu virus begins to spread easily person-to-person, it could sweep across the country and around the world in very short time. This would cause an influenza pandemic.

What is swine flu?

Swine Influenza (swine flu) is a respiratory disease of pigs caused by type A influenza viruses that causes regular outbreaks in pigs. People do not normally get swine flu, but human infections can and do happen. Swine flu viruses have been reported to spread from person-to-person, but in the past, this transmission was limited and not sustained beyond three people.

Are there human infections with swine flu in the U.S.?

In late March and early April 2009, cases of human infection with swine influenza A (H1N1) viruses were first reported in Southern California and near San Antonio, Texas. Other U.S. states have reported cases of swine flu infection in humans and cases have been reported internationally as well.

Is this swine flu virus contagious?

CDC has determined that this swine influenza A (H1N1) virus is contagious and is spreading from human to human. However, at this time, it not known how easily the virus spreads between people.

What are the signs and symptoms of swine flu in people?

The symptoms of swine flu in people are similar to the symptoms of regular human flu and include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people have reported diarrhea and vomiting associated with swine flu. In the past, severe illness (pneumonia and respiratory failure) and deaths have been reported with swine flu infection in people. Like seasonal flu, swine flu may cause a worsening of underlying chronic medical conditions.

How does swine flu spread?

Spread of this swine influenza A (H1N1) virus is thought to be happening in the same way that seasonal flu spreads. Flu viruses are spread mainly from person to person through coughing or sneezing of people with influenza. Sometimes people may become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose.

How can someone with the flu infect someone else?

Infected people may be able to infect others beginning 1 day before symptoms develop and up to 7 or more days after becoming sick. That means that you may be able to pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick.

What should I do to keep from getting the flu?

First and most important: wash your hands. Try to stay in good general health. Get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids, and eat nutritious food. Try not touch surfaces that may be contaminated with the flu virus. Avoid close contact with people who are sick.

Are there medicines to treat swine flu?

Yes. CDC recommends the use of oseltamivir or zanamivir for the treatment and/or prevention of infection with these 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. For treatment, antiviral drugs work best if started soon after getting sick (within 2 days of symptoms). Your physician will decide if you will need treatment with antivirals.

How long can an infected person spread swine flu to others?

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

What surfaces are most likely to be sources of contamination?

Germs 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 a 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.

How long can viruses live outside the body?

We know that some viruses and bacteria can live 2 hours or longer on surfaces like cafeteria

tables, doorknobs, and desks. Frequent handwashing will help you reduce the chance of getting contamination from these common surfaces.

What can I do to protect myself from getting sick?

There is no vaccine available right now to protect against swine flu. There are everyday actions that can help prevent the spread of germs that cause respiratory illnesses like influenza. Take these everyday steps to protect your health:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- If you get sick with influenza, CDC recommends that you stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.

What is the best way to keep from spreading the virus through coughing or sneezing?

If you are sick, limit your contact with other people as much as possible. Do not go to work or school if ill. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. It may prevent those around you from getting sick. Put your used tissue in the waste basket. Cover your cough or sneeze if you do not have a tissue. Then, clean your hands, and do so every time you cough or sneeze.

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What is the best technique for washing my hands to avoid getting the flu?

Washing your hands often will help protect you from germs. Wash with soap and water or clean with alcohol-based hand cleaner. We recommend that when you wash your hands with soap and warm water and that you wash for 15 to 20 seconds. When soap and water are not available, alcohol-based disposable hand wipes or gel sanitizers may be used. You can find them in most supermarkets and drugstores. If using gel, rub your hands until the gel is dry. The gel doesn't need water to work; the alcohol in it kills the germs on your hands.

What should I do if I get sick?

If you live in areas where swine influenza cases have been identified and become ill with influenza-like symptoms, including fever, body aches, runny nose, sore throat, nausea, or vomiting or diarrhea, you may want to contact their health care provider, particularly if you are worried about your symptoms. Your health care provider will determine whether influenza testing or treatment is needed.

If you are sick, you should stay home and avoid contact with other people as much as possible to keep from spreading your illness to others.

If you become ill and experience any of the following warning signs, seek emergency medical care.

In children emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

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

In adults, emergency warning signs that need 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

How serious is swine flu infection?

Like seasonal flu, swine flu in humans 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 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 in Fort Dix, New Jersey occurred in 1976 that caused more than 200 cases with serious illness in several people and one death.

Can I get swine influenza from eating or preparing pork?

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

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Should I wear a mask?

No, at this point we are not recommending that anyone wear masks except for health care providers who are working with patients who have flu like symptoms.

Are any people being quarantined or isolated currently?

At this time, no one has been quarantined or isolated. There are currently no cases of swine flu in Santa Clara County, but if a case of swine flu were identified here, the Public Health Department would provide instructions about what precautions to take to protect yourself and others.

What is the difference between a pandemic and an epidemic?

An influenza pandemic is a worldwide outbreak of disease that occurs when a new influenza virus appears or “emerges” in the human population, causing serious illness and then spreads easily from person-to-person worldwide.

An influenza epidemic is a widespread outbreak usually caused by seasonal human influenza viruses. The current outbreak of swine flu in Mexico is unusual, but at this time it would be considered an epidemic involving a new influenza strain, not a pandemic.

What are public health officials doing?

Since the first cases were identified, federal and local health officials have monitored the situation and have tracked down others who had close contact with these cases.

Federal health officials have asked Public Health Departments around the country to begin monitoring the community for new cases of swine flu. The Santa Clara County Public Health Department, under direction from the Health Officer, sent a Health Alert to physicians in Santa Clara County. The Health Alert provides clinical information about swine flu, as well as directs community doctors to take specimens from patients with flulike symptoms and report results to the Public Health Department.

The Santa Clara County Public Health Department is currently increasing active surveillance by having public health nurses work with all Santa Clara County hospitals to assist infection control staff and report findings quickly to the Department. Public Health will also develop recommendations and guidance for local school districts, the San Jose International Airport, and work with the Mexican Consulate to provide information to the farm worker community and others that may be particularly at-risk.

Is this an act of terrorism?

At this time, the Public Health Department has every indication that this is a natural occurrence of disease. There is no data or evidence to suggest that this is an act of terrorism.

Where can I get more information?

For the latest updates including Home Care Guide instructions and checklist for preparing for an influenza emergency, visit the Santa Clara County Public Health Department website at www.sccphd.org. You can also call 211 or the Public Health Information Line at 408.885.3980.

For more information about swine flu, visit www.cdc.gov/flu/swine

For information in Spanish, visit http://www.cdc.gov/flu/swine/espanol/swine_espanol.htm