

What is swine Flu? How Can you prevent infection?

On April 29, 2009, the World Health Organization increased the pandemic alert from level four to level five for swine flu. Up to April 30, 2009, 11 countries have officially reported a total of 257 cases of swine flu. In the U.S., the government has reported 109 laboratory-confirmed human cases, including one death. Mexico has reported 97 confirmed human cases of infection, including seven deaths.



Here are some helpful answers from WebMD to common questions about this illness:

What is swine flu?

Like people, pigs can get influenza (flu), but swine flu viruses aren't the same as human flu viruses. Swine flu doesn't often infect people, and the rare human cases that have occurred in the past have mainly affected people who had direct contact with pigs. But the current swine flu outbreak is different. It's caused by a new swine flu virus that has spread from person to person -- and it's happening among people who haven't had any contact with pigs.

What are swine flu symptoms?

Symptoms of swine flu are like regular flu symptoms and include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills, and fatigue. Some people have reported diarrhea and vomiting associated with swine flu. Those symptoms can also be caused by many other conditions, and that means that you and your doctor can't know, just based on your symptoms, if you've got swine flu. It takes a lab test to tell whether it's swine flu or some other condition.

If I think I have swine flu, what should I do? When should I see my doctor?

If you have flu symptoms, stay home, and when you cough or sneeze, cover your mouth and nose with a tissue. Afterward, throw the tissue in the trash and wash your hands. That will help prevent your flu from spreading.

If you've got flu symptoms, and you've recently been to a high-risk area like Mexico, CDC officials recommend that you see your doctor. If you

have flu symptoms but you haven't been in a high-risk area, you can still see a doctor -- that's your call.

Keep in mind that your doctor will not be able to determine whether you have swine flu, but he or she would take a sample from you and send it to a state health department lab for testing to see if it's swine flu. If your doctor suspects swine flu, he or she would be able to write you a prescription for Tamiflu or Relenza. Those drugs may not be required; U.S. swine flu patients have made a full recovery without it.

How does swine flu spread? Is it airborne?

The new swine flu virus apparently spreads just like regular flu. You could pick up germs directly from an infected person, or by touching an object they recently touched, and then touching your eyes, mouth, or nose, delivering their germs for your own infection. That's why you should make washing your hands a habit, even when you're not ill. Infected people can start spreading flu germs up to a day before symptoms start, and for up to seven days after getting sick, according to the CDC.

The swine flu virus can become airborne if you cough or sneeze without covering your nose and mouth, sending germs into the air.

The U.S. residents infected with swine flu virus had no direct contact with pigs. The CDC says it's likely that the infections represent widely separated cycles of human-to-human infections.

How is swine flu treated?

The new swine flu virus is sensitive to the antiviral drugs Tamiflu and Relenza. The CDC recommends those drugs to prevent or treat swine flu; the drugs are most effective when taken within 48 hours of the start of flu symptoms. But not everyone needs those drugs; many of the first people in the U.S. with lab-confirmed swine flu recovered without treatment. The Department of Homeland Security has released 25% of its stockpile of Tamiflu and Relenza to states. Health officials have asked people not to hoard Tamiflu or Relenza.

Is there a vaccine against the new swine flu virus?

No. But the CDC and the World Health Organization are already taking the first steps toward making such a vaccine. That's a lengthy process -- it takes months.

I had a flu vaccine this season. Am I protected against swine flu?

No. This season's flu vaccine wasn't made with the new swine flu virus in mind; no one saw this virus coming ahead of time.

If you were vaccinated against flu last fall or winter, that vaccination will go a long way toward protecting you against certain human flu virus strains. But the new swine flu virus is a whole other problem.

How can I prevent swine flu infection?

The CDC recommends taking these steps:

- Wash your hands regularly with soap and water, especially after coughing or sneezing. Or use an alcohol-based hand cleaner.
- Avoid close contact with sick people.
- Avoid touching your mouth, nose, or eyes.

According to Traditional Chinese Medicine theory, people are more prone to becoming infected from the swine flu virus if their Lung and Spleen Qi is weak. In China, acupuncture and Traditional Chinese Medicine has been playing a very important role in treating and preventing the cold and flu. It is a tradition of the Chinese culture that during flu season, schools and companies provide flu prevention tea to students and employees. In doing so, it has been proven in Chinese history to be effective in preventing the spread of the flu. This act also helped to fight SARS and Bird's Flu in the last few years.

On April 30, 2009, the Chinese government announced to the public a number of Chinese herbal formulas that may help prevent the swine flu by strengthening the immune system and defeating the invasion of the virus. For the health of our patients, we have made those formulas available here at the Art Of Wellness! We have prepared these formulas as an herbal tea.

Let's start the first step in gaining a stronger immune system to fight the swine flu.