

Swine Flu

Hello. I'm Dr. Joe Bresee with the CDC Influenza Division. I'm here to speak with you today about swine flu.

First, I'll begin by explaining what swine flu is. Swine flu is a respiratory disease of pigs caused by type A influenza viruses. Outbreaks of swine flu happen regularly in pigs. People do not normally get swine flu, but human infections can and do occur. Most commonly, human cases of swine flu happen in people who are around pigs, but it's possible for swine flu viruses to spread from person to person, also.

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, as well. In the past, severe illnesses, such as pneumonia and respiratory failure, as well as deaths, have been reported with swine influenza infection in people, as well. Like seasonal flu, swine flu may cause a worsening of underlying chronic medical conditions.

I'll now discuss the severity of swine flu illness in people. Similar to 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 United States 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 she died eight days later. A swine flu outbreak in Fort Dix, New Jersey occurred in 1976 that caused more than 200 cases with severe illness in several people and one death.

Spread of swine flu can occur in two ways. The first way is through contact with infected pigs or environments contaminated with swine flu viruses. The second way is through contact with a person infected with a swine flu virus. Human-to-human spread of swine flu has also been documented and is thought to occur in the same way as seasonal flu. Influenza is thought to be spread mainly person-to-person through coughing or sneezing of infected people.

Next, I would like to tell you about medicines that can be used to treat swine flu. CDC recommends the use of oseltamivir or zanamivir for the treatment and, alternatively, prevention of infection with these swine flu viruses. Antiviral drugs are prescription medicines, such as pills, liquids, or inhaler that fights against the flu by keeping flu viruses from reproducing in your body. If you get sick, antiviral drugs can make your illness milder and can make you feel better faster. They may also prevent serious flu complications. For treatment, antiviral drugs work best if started soon after getting sick, specifically within two days of symptoms.

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

There is no vaccine available right now to protect against swine flu. However, there are everyday actions that people can take to 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.
- 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.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth because germs can spread that way.

Now, I will move on to discuss what you should do if you get sick. If you live in an area where swine flu infections have been reported, and if you become ill with influenza-like symptoms, including fever, body aches, runny nose, sore throat, nausea, or vomiting or diarrhea, you may want to contact your health care provider, particularly if you're worried about your symptoms. Your health care provider will determine whether influenza testing or treatment is needed. If you're 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, fever with a rash, or flu-like symptoms that improve but then return with a fever and worse cough.

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, and severe or persistent vomiting.

People don't need to worry about eating or preparing pork. Swine influenza viruses are not spread by food. Eating properly handled and cooked pork products is safe.