

A new influenza virus that spreads between people has recently been identified. This influenza is called swine influenza, because it is derived from an influenza virus that normally infects pigs. The situation is rapidly evolving. No cases of swine flu have been identified in Australia as of 28 April 2009.

Swine flu

Issued: 28 April 2009

What is swine influenza (swine 'flu)?

Swine influenza (swine flu) is a respiratory disease of pigs caused by type A influenza. Swine flu viruses do not normally infect humans, however, human infections with swine flu do occur, and cases of human-to-human spread of a swine flu virus have been recently confirmed.

What is the current situation?

Human cases of a new form of influenza virus were identified in the United States, Mexico and Canada in April 2009. The influenza is a swine influenza A virus. The World Health Organization has declared the swine influenza situation to be a public health emergency of international concern.

No cases of swine influenza have been confirmed in Australia as of 28 April 2009.

The pandemic alert level has been raised by the World Health Organization.

This event is of concern because:

- Swine influenza is derived from an animal influenza virus, which means that humans will likely have little or no immunity
- There has been rapid spread to multiple communities overseas
- Swine influenza is affecting unusual age groups (healthy, young adults).

The Swine Influenza A virus is thought to be sensitive to the new antiviral drugs oseltamivir (Tamiflu) and zanamivir (Relenza), but resistant to both amantadine and rimantadine.

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms of swine influenza are similar to normal influenza (fever, cough, tiredness, muscle aches, sore throat, chills, shortness of breath, runny nose, headache). Some cases of swine influenza have also complained of vomiting and diarrhoea. In some cases, swine influenza can result in a severe pneumonia. Symptoms of influenza generally appear between two to four days after exposure.

Who is at risk?

Currently, travellers exposed to cases of swine influenza overseas are at risk of becoming infected with the new swine influenza virus.

How is it prevented?

As the new swine influenza strain has only been identified recently, a human vaccine for swine influenza is not yet available. Existing vaccines for normal human influenza will probably not provide protection against swine influenza. Scientists worldwide are working to develop a suitable human vaccine against swine influenza A (H1N1), however a vaccine is not expected to become available in the near future.

Until a vaccine becomes available, the best method of prevention will be to ensure that everyone washes their hands regularly and thoroughly, steps away from others when they cough or sneeze, coughs or sneezes into tissues and stays away from people who are sick.

What should I do if I develop symptoms?

People who develop influenza-like symptoms should stay at home until they are completely better. People who have recently returned from affected areas and who develop influenza-like symptoms or breathing difficulties should contact their local public health unit, general practitioner or emergency department. Swine influenza virus infection can be diagnosed using swabs from the nose and throat. Testing is done at a specialised laboratory.

How is it treated?

If you become unwell and suspect that you may have swine influenza, you should contact your local public health unit or general practitioner, or go to your nearest hospital emergency department for assessment and treatment. Specific anti-influenza drugs are likely to be effective against swine influenza.

What is the public health response?

There have been no confirmed cases of swine influenza in Australia as of 27 April 2009. There is enhanced surveillance for people infected with swine influenza, especially in people who have returned from affected areas within the last 7 days.

Should suspected human cases occur in NSW, the local public health unit will work with the patient, the treating doctors, and the laboratory to confirm the diagnosis. Suspected cases will be asked to isolate themselves from others to prevent further infection.

Travel advice

The situation is changing rapidly. For updated information on affected areas, see the Australian Government travel advice website. Always wash your hands thoroughly after coming into contact with sick people, after coughing, sneezing or going to the toilet, or before eating.

For more information

Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing swine influenza information hotline **1802007**

Related links

NSW Health swine flu website

http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/publichealth/swine_flu.asp

NSW Health influenza factsheet (usual human influenza)

<http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/pubs/topics/Influenza.pdf>

Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing

<http://www.health.gov.au/>

World Health Organization

<http://www.who.int/>

Travel Advice (Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade)

<http://www.smarttraveller.gov.au>

U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

<http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu>

Further information – Public Health Units in NSW					
For more information please contact your doctor, local public health unit or community health centre – look under <i>NSW Government</i> at the front of the White Pages.					
Metropolitan Areas			Rural Areas		
Northern Sydney / Central Coast	Hornsby	02 9477 9400	Greater Southern	Goulburn	02 4824 1837
	Gosford	02 4349 4845		Albury	02 6080 8900
South Eastern Sydney / Illawarra	Randwick	02 9382 8333	Greater Western	Broken Hill	08 8080 1499
	Wollongong	02 4221 6700		Dubbo	02 6841 5569
Sydney South West	Camperdown	02 9515 9420	Hunter / New England	Bathurst	02 6339 5601
				Newcastle	02 4924 6477
Sydney West	Penrith	02 4734 2022		Tamworth	02 6767 8630
	Parramatta	02 9840 3603	North Coast	Port Macquarie	02 6588 2750
Justice Health Service	Matra ville	02 9311 2707		Lismore	02 6620 7500
NSW Department of Health	Nth Sydney	02 9391 9000			
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