



Swine flu facts

April 2009

The Washington state Department of Health is in close contact with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) regarding swine influenza in parts of the United States, Canada and Mexico. The department is working closely with local health agencies around the state to monitor cases of pneumonia and influenza to see if they're due to this new infection. Health care providers and laboratories in Washington have been asked to watch for influenza, especially in people who traveled to Mexico or other affected areas.

What is swine flu?

- Influenza A viruses causes illness in humans and many animals.
- Some influenza A viruses are adapted to pigs and cause respiratory illness in them, and so have been called "swine flu."
- Viruses that cause swine flu do not normally infect humans, although rare human infections with swine flu have occurred.
- The swine influenza virus that is being investigated now is different than the virus that causes illness in pigs and is not being transmitted from pigs to humans. This new swine flu influenza virus appears to be more able to be transmitted person-to-person.
- Human symptoms for this new type of swine flu are similar to the symptoms of regular human influenza that happens every year. Those include fever, cough and sore throat. In addition, fatigue, lack of appetite, runny nose, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea have been reported.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has determined that the swine flu virus causing mild illness in some states is the same strain as the virus causing an outbreak of respiratory illness among humans in some areas of Mexico.

Are there cases of this new swine influenza in Washington state?

- There are no known cases of swine influenza in people in Washington so far.
- Local health departments, health care providers and labs have been asked to be on the look out for influenza A cases, especially in people who recently traveled to Mexico or states with cases of human swine flu.
- The Department of Health has not seen an increase in the number of flu cases in Washington.

Can people catch this new swine flu from eating pork?

- No. This new swine influenza virus is not transmitted by food. It is transmitted from person-to-person like human influenza viruses.
- You can not get swine influenza from eating pork or pork products. Eating properly handled and cooked pork and a pork product is safe.

Current status of outbreak

- As of April 26, 2009, swine flu infections have been confirmed in people living in five states: California; Texas; Kansas; New York City and Ohio. No deaths due to this virus have been found in the United States. (See CDC website for current information - www.cdc.gov/swineflu/investigation.htm.) Cases have also been confirmed in Canada.

- Swine flu infections have been documented in Mexico, but it is not yet known if all of the fatal or hospitalized respiratory illness cases are actually due to this swine flu. This is being investigated.

What can people do to avoid getting sick?

- There are no known cases in Washington state but precautions to avoid transmitting respiratory illnesses should be taken.
- This new swine flu virus is spread person-to-person. Infection occurs when the virus gets into the airways and lungs. However, it isn't known how easily the virus spreads. As with any infectious disease that is spread through the human respiratory system, health officials recommended the following precautions:
 - 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 frequently, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hands cleaners are also effective;
 - Try to avoid close contact with sick people;
 - If you get sick, stay home and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them;
 - Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.
- These are the same precautions that should be taken to stop transmitting all influenza viruses and other viruses that are transmitted from the respiratory tract.

How do people get it?

- Although this new virus has been called "swine flu virus," it is not transmitted from pigs to humans. It is transmitted person-to-person.
- Flu and other respiratory infections are transmitted when people cough and sneeze, spreading germs through the air, or on to surfaces that others can come in contact with.

Will government be issuing a travel advisory?

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has issued a travelers' health notice for Mexico and states where there have been swine influenza cases. This is to inform travelers that an outbreak of respiratory illness is occurring and that precautions should be taken. Health officials are not recommending people avoid travel at this time.
- Travelers should follow the same precautionary measures that are recommended to protect against seasonal influenza – frequent hand washing, covering coughs and sneezes, and staying home when ill. For more information about the CDC health notice and travel precautions go to <http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/investigation.htm#travel>

What do I do if I've been to Mexico or the U.S. and I have symptoms of a respiratory illness?

- If you have recently been to Mexico or affected areas in the U.S. and have symptoms of influenza such as fever, cough, and sore throat, you should contact your health care provider to discuss your symptoms. Make sure to tell your health care professional about your travel history.

Are there medicines to treat swine flu?

- Yes, there are effective medicines to treat all human influenza viruses and this new swine influenza virus.
- Whether a person with influenza needs to take one of these medicines is a decision that must be made by the patient and their health care provider.
- These medicines are generally used to prevent serious flu complications such as pneumonia and work best if started soon after getting sick (within 2 days of symptoms).
- In addition, in special situations, these medicines may be used to prevent a person from getting ill or infected from this new swine flu.
- A vaccine to prevent people from getting this new type of flu has not yet been developed.

Where I can find more information?

- People can call the Centers for Disease Control hotline at **1-800-CDC-INFO (232-4636)**.
- The travel health notice for Mexico and areas of the United states issued by the CDC can be found at <http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/investigation.htm#travel>
- Additional information can be found at:
 - U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at www.cdc.gov/swineflu/investigation.htm;
 - World Health Organization www.who.int/csr/disease/swineflu/en/index.html.
 - Washington state Department of Health www.doh.wa.gov

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