

H1N1 Flu Virus (Human Swine Flu): Fact Sheet for Nova Scotians April 29, 2009 1500

What is swine influenza?

Swine influenza (sometimes called swine flu) is a respiratory illness of pigs caused by type A influenza that regularly causes outbreaks of influenza among pigs. Swine influenza viruses do not normally infect humans. However, human infections with swine influenza do occur, and cases of human-to-human spread of swine influenza viruses have been documented.

Human swine influenza is a respiratory illness that causes symptoms similar to those of the regular human seasonal influenza.

What are the symptoms of human swine influenza?

The symptoms of human swine influenza include:

- Cough
- Fever
- Chills
- Fatigue
- Sore throat
- Body aches/headache
- Eye pain
- Lack of appetite
- Vomiting and diarrhea (in children under 5 years of age)

How is the human swine influenza virus spread?

At this time the virus is contagious to humans, however, it is not known how easily the virus spreads between people.

Coughs and sneezes release the germs into the air where they can be breathed in by others.

Germs can also rest on hard surfaces like counters and doorknobs, where they can be picked up on hands and transferred to the lungs when someone touches their mouth and/or nose.

What is the treatment?

Because human swine influenza is caused by a virus, antibiotics are not effective. Antiviral medications can sometimes help lessen influenza symptoms, but require a prescription.

Who will be treated?

Treatment (if any) will vary depending upon the situation. Public Health will discuss treatment with the physician on a case by case basis.

What should I do if I have been diagnosed with human swine influenza?

You should stay home from work, school, public places and other social settings. Avoid close contact with others for seven days after your symptoms started. This is the time when the illness can be spread to others. If your symptoms worsen, see your healthcare provider.

How can I prevent spreading or picking up human swine influenza?

- Wash your hands with soap and warm water, or use hand sanitizer.
- Cough and sneeze in your arm or sleeve.
- Keep doing what you normally do, but stay home when you are sick.
- Do not share drinking glasses or eating utensils.
- Get your annual influenza vaccine

Can you get human swine influenza from eating pork?

No. Proper cooking of pork products would kill influenza viruses. Make sure pork is cooked through, not pink in the middle. Use a food thermometer to confirm pork has been heated through to 71 degrees Celsius (160 degrees Fahrenheit).

Should I wear a mask?

The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) does not recommend the public wear surgical masks to protect against human swine influenza. Evidence shows these are not effective in preventing spread of influenza in the public. People often wear masks incorrectly, or contaminate them when putting them on and taking them off, which could increase the risk of illness.

If I've been to the areas where there are cases of human swine influenza or I've been in contact with someone who has human swine influenza, and I'm feeling sick, what should I do?

Isolate yourself (keep away from others), and see your health care professional to discuss your symptoms. Make sure to tell your health care professional about your travel history.

What does isolation mean?

Isolation means keeping sick people away from healthy people and limiting their activity to stop the spread of an illness. When isolated, you should stay away from others in your home; (ie. in a separate room in your house), and if you are in a room with others, a surgical mask should be worn.

If I have travel plans to areas where there are cases of human swine influenza, what should I do?

As of April 27, 2009, PHAC is recommending Canadians postpone elective or non-essential travel to Mexico until further notice. This information can be found at www.phac-aspc.gc.ca If you are traveling to affected areas, you should do the same things you would normally do to protect yourself and others during normal influenza season. Wash your hands, cover coughs and sneezes, stay in if you are sick, and get a yearly influenza immunization.

Public Health in Nova Scotia is encouraging all travelers going to Mexico (who have not received the influenza vaccine this influenza season; November 2008- present) to be vaccinated. Even though the yearly influenza vaccine may not protect against the human swine influenza, there is still seasonal influenza in Mexico and the vaccine will help protect you from getting seasonal human influenza.

Is this the next influenza pandemic?

Pandemic influenza is defined as a new influenza virus that spreads easily between humans. The H1N1 human swine influenza that has been identified appears to be a new virus, and there is some evidence of human-to-human transmission.

However, more investigation and information is needed to determine the severity of the disease and the ease with which it can spread. These investigations are ongoing.

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