

Swine Flu



Swine flu

Swine flu also known as swine influenza is caused by any strain of influenza virus endemic in pigs (swine). Strains endemic in swine are called **swine influenza virus (SIV)**.

Swine flu is common in swine but rare in humans. People who work with swine, especially people with intense exposures, are at risk of catching swine influenza if the swine carry a strain able to infect humans. However, these strains rarely are able to pass from human to human. The strain responsible for the 2009 swine flu outbreak is believed to have undergone such a mutation.

2009 swine flu outbreak

The new influenza strain, a conglomeration of genetic fragments from swine, bird and human viruses, is the biggest threat of a large-scale flu pandemic.

At least 68 died and more than 1,000 became sick with flu- like symptoms in the Mexico City region in the past month. Swine flu was confirmed in 20 of the deaths so far. Of 14 tissue samples tested from Mexico, half were a genetic match with the swine flu reported in people in California and Texas.

The flu virus is perhaps the trickiest known to medical science; it constantly changes form to elude the protective antibodies that the body has developed in response to previous exposures to influenza or to influenza vaccines. Every two or three years the virus undergoes minor changes. Then, at intervals of roughly a decade, after the bulk of the world's population has developed some level of resistance to these minor changes, it undergoes a major shift that enables it to tear off on yet another pandemic sweep around the world, infecting hundreds of millions of people who suddenly find their antibody defenses outflanked.

And this time the strain has recombined to create something totally new, what it will lead to is impossible to predict. The WHO has said the present outbreak could cause a global pandemic and the situation is serious. Properly handled and cooked pork and its product are safe. Cooking pork to an internal temperature of 160°F kills the swine flu virus as it does other bacteria and viruses.

Symptoms

In humans, the symptoms of swine flu are similar to those of influenza and of influenza-like illness in general, namely chills, fever, sore throat, muscle pains, severe headache, coughing, vomiting, weakness and general discomfort. The strain responsible for the 2009 swine flu outbreak in most cases has caused only mild symptoms.

Diagnosis

Diagnosis of swine flu requires laboratory testing of a respiratory sample, a simple nose and throat swab.

Treatment and Prevention

The antiviral medicines can be taken to prevent or treat swine flu. Antiviral medicines don't cure the flu, but they do help lessen symptoms and speeds recovery.

There is no vaccine available right now to protect against swine flu.

One can help prevent the spread of germs that cause respiratory illnesses like influenza by

- Covering nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. Throwing the tissue in the trash after use.
- Washing hands often with soap and water, especially after coughing or sneezing. Alcohol based hand cleaners can also be used.
- Avoiding touching eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Trying to avoid close contact with sick people.
- Staying home from work or school if one is sick.

Tests so far have shown that antiviral drugs such as Tamiflu are effective against the particular strain of 2009 human outbreak and the WHO says the world should be well-placed to combat the outbreak.

Vaccines against the strain in the 2009 human outbreak are being developed and could be ready as early as June 2009.

Eating Pork

Swine influenza viruses are not transmitted by food. One cannot get swine influenza from eating pork or pork products.

