

What is swine flu?

Swine flu is a respiratory disease normally found in pigs and caused by type A influenza viruses. While outbreaks of this type of flu are most common in pigs, human cases of swine flu do happen. In the past, reports of human swine flu have been rare—approximately one infection every one to two years in the United States. From December 2005 through February 2009, only 12 cases of human infection were documented.

How is it spread?

Humans with direct exposure to pigs are those most commonly infected with swine flu. Human-to-human spread of swine flu viruses have been documented; however, it's not known how easily the spread occurs. Just as the common flu is passed along, swine flu is thought to be spread by coughing, sneezing, or touching something that has the live virus on it.

If infected, a person may be able to infect another person one day before symptoms develop; therefore, a person is able to pass the flu on *before* they know they are sick. Infected individuals may spread the virus for seven or more days after becoming sick. Those with swine flu should be considered potentially contagious as long as they are showing symptoms, and up to seven days or longer from the onset of their illness. Children might be contagious for longer periods of time.

Can I catch swine flu from eating pork?

No. The CDC says that swine flu viruses are not transmitted by food. Properly cooking pork to an internal temperature of 160°F kills all bacteria and viruses.

What are the symptoms of swine flu?

Symptoms of swine flu are similar to those of a regular flu: fever and chills, sore throat, cough, headache, body aches, and fatigue. Diarrhea and vomiting can also be present. Without a specific lab test, it is impossible to know whether you may be suffering from swine flu or another flu strain, or a different disease entirely.

What precautionary measures should I take?

The same everyday precautions that you take to prevent other contagious viruses should be used to protect yourself against swine flu. "The best current advice is for individuals to practice good hand hygiene. Periodic hand washing with soap and water, or the use of an alcohol-based hand sanitizer when hand washing is not possible, is a good preventive measure. Also, avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth, as germs can more easily gain entrance into your body through those areas," suggests [Rob Danoff](#), D.O., an MSN health expert. Covering your mouth with a disposable tissue when you cough and sneeze is also a good practice.

The CDC recommends avoiding contact with sick people and keeping your own good health in check with adequate sleep, exercise, and a nutritious diet.

What should you do if you think you are sick with swine flu?

Contact your health care professional, inform them of your symptoms, and ask whether you should be tested for swine flu. Be prepared to give details on how long you've been feeling ill and about any recent travels. Your health care provider will determine whether influenza testing or treatment is needed. If you feel sick, but are not sure what illness you may have, stay home until you have been diagnosed properly to avoid spreading any infection.

Watch for these symptoms in children. Seek emergency medical care if your child experiences any of the following warning signs:

- Fever with a rash
- Dehydration
- Fast breathing
- Bluish skin coloration
- Slow to wake or sluggish interaction
- Flu-like symptoms improve, but then return and cough worsens
- Severe irritability

For adults, emergency medical care is needed if you experience these warning signs:

- Difficulty breathing
- Dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Pain or pressure in the chest or stomach

Remember that the symptoms for swine flu are almost identical to those you might experience with the regular flu. Only your doctor can give you the correct diagnosis.

Are there medicines effective in treating swine flu in humans?

The current strain of the swine flu appears to respond to the use of [oseltamivir \(Tamiflu\)](#), or zanamivir (Relenza) for those infected. For treatment, these antiviral drugs work best if started soon after getting sick (within two days of the appearance of symptoms), and for that reason, it's important to notify your health care provider right away if your symptoms are severe.

Are there a vaccine available to protect against swine flu?

No, there is no vaccine to protect humans from this new strain of swine flu. Steps have been taken to start developing one, though the process is complex and can take months.

Would a recent vaccination for the seasonal flu help protect against swine flu?

The CDC reports that those individuals who received the seasonal flu vaccine do not have added protection against the swine flu. The human H1N1 viruses are very different from the H1N1 viruses responsible for the recent outbreaks of swine flu. Therefore, a seasonal flu vaccine would *not* protect against the swine flu.

More information

- [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)
- [Infectious Diseases: How they spread and how to stop them](#)