
This document has been adapted from a document produced by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/swineflu_you.htm on April 27, 2009

What is the Oklahoma State Department of Health doing in response to the current swine flu?

The OSDH continues to monitor cases of swine flu infection in the US and other countries. For the last several days, the OSDH has been in communication with our federal, state and local partners in monitoring the disease activity throughout the U.S. and other countries. In addition, we have activated our Emergency Operations Center to coordinate public health response activities and follow up on any suspect cases throughout the state.

The OSDH has asked physicians and hospitals to be vigilant in collecting specimens from patients who present with symptoms of influenza-like illness. Specimens can be sent to the OSDH Public Health Laboratory for typing to determine if Oklahoma patients have the swine flu virus. In particular, the OSDH is asking health care providers to ask patients with flu symptoms about their recent travel history to Mexico or other countries or states where cases have been confirmed.

The OSDH has also issued a public health advisory for Oklahoma travelers to Mexico, where hundreds of swine flu cases have been reported. While in Mexico, travelers should wash hands frequently, avoid close contact with persons who are coughing or otherwise appear ill, and avoid touching eyes, nose or mouth. Upon return from Mexico, persons should contact their physician if they develop influenza-like symptoms.

What is swine flu?

Swine Influenza (swine flu) is a respiratory disease of pigs caused by type A influenza viruses. People do not normally get swine flu, but human infections can and do happen. Recently, cases of a new strain of the swine flu virus have been confirmed. The virus appears to be transmitted person-to-person.

How many swine flu viruses are there?

Like all influenza viruses, swine flu viruses change constantly. Pigs can be infected by avian influenza and human influenza viruses as well as swine influenza viruses. When influenza viruses from different species infect pigs, the viruses can reassort (i.e. swap genes) and new viruses that are a mix of swine, human and/or avian influenza viruses can emerge. Over the years, different variations of swine flu viruses have emerged. At this time, there are four main influenza type A virus subtypes that have been isolated in pigs: H1N1, H1N2, H3N2, and H3N1. However, most of the recently isolated influenza viruses from pigs have been H1N1 viruses.

Is this the same as the bird flu that has been in the news in recent years?

No. There are many different types of influenza viruses. The bird flu virus that has been watched closely is categorized as influenza A (H5N1), and is transmitted primarily among birds. This virus has not been found in the United States.

Are there human infections with swine flu in the U.S.?

In late March and early April 2009, cases of human infection with swine influenza A (H1N1) viruses were first reported in Southern California and near San Antonio, Texas. Other U.S. states have reported cases of swine flu infection in humans and cases have been reported internationally as well. An updated case count of confirmed swine flu infections in the United States is kept at www.cdc.gov/swineflu/investigation.htm. The local and state health agencies and CDC are all working together to investigate this situation.

Is this swine flu virus contagious?

Public Health Officials have determined that this swine influenza A (H1N1) virus is contagious and is spreading from human to human. However, at this time, it not known how easily the virus spreads between people.

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What are the signs and symptoms of swine flu in people?

The symptoms of swine flu in people are similar to the symptoms of regular human flu and include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people have reported diarrhea and vomiting associated with swine flu. In the past, severe illness (pneumonia and respiratory failure) and deaths have been reported with swine flu infection in people. Like seasonal flu, swine flu may cause a worsening of underlying chronic medical conditions.

How does swine flu spread?

Spread of this swine influenza A (H1N1) virus is thought to be happening in the same way that seasonal flu spreads. Influenza is spread from person to person by respiratory droplets expelled during talking, coughing, laughing or sneezing. Transmission may also occur by direct contact with contaminated objects and then touching one's mouth or nose.

How long can someone with the flu infect someone else?

Infected people may be able to infect others beginning one day before symptoms develop and up to seven or more days after becoming sick. That means that you may be able to pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick.

What should I do to keep from getting the flu?

First and most important: wash your hands. Work to stay in good general health. Get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids, and eat nutritious food. Avoid touching surfaces that may be contaminated with the flu virus. Avoid close contact with people who are sick.

Are there medicines to treat swine flu?

Yes. CDC recommends the use of oseltamivir or zanamivir for the treatment and/or prevention of infection with these swine influenza viruses. Antiviral drugs are prescription medicines (pills, liquid or an inhaler) that fight against the flu by keeping flu viruses from reproducing in your body. If you get sick, antiviral drugs can make your illness milder and make you feel better faster. They may also prevent serious flu complications. For treatment, antiviral drugs work best if started soon after getting sick (within 2 days of symptoms).

Should I ask my doctor for a prescription anti-flu drug?

No. Antiviral drugs are usually used to treat people who are at risk for developing life-threatening complications from the flu. There is no reason to routinely ask for one of these drugs to keep at home, or to take them just as a precaution. Over-use could result in limited supplies for those who need it most. In addition, over-use of antiviral drugs has been known to lead to flu viruses becoming resistant to the drugs. All drugs, including antivirals, can cause side effects and should only be used when necessary under the direction of a health care provider.

How long can an infected person spread swine flu to others?

People with swine influenza virus infection should be considered potentially contagious as long as they are symptomatic and possibly for up to 7 days following illness onset. Children, especially younger children, might potentially be contagious for longer periods.

What surfaces are most likely to be sources of contamination?

Germs can be spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose, or mouth. Droplets from a cough or sneeze of an infected person move through the air. Germs can be spread when a person touches respiratory droplets from another person on a surface like a desk and then touches their own eyes, mouth or nose before washing their hands.

How long can viruses live outside the body?

Some viruses and bacteria can live 2 hours or longer on surfaces like cafeteria tables, doorknobs, and desks. Frequent handwashing will help you reduce the chance of getting contamination from these common surfaces.

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What can I do to protect myself from getting sick?

There is no vaccine available right now to protect against swine flu. There are everyday actions that can help prevent the spread of germs that cause respiratory illnesses like influenza. Take these everyday steps to protect your health:

- 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, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective when your hands are not visibly dirty. Children using these products should be supervised by adults.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- If you get sick with influenza, public health officials recommend that you stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.

What is the best way to keep from spreading the virus through coughing or sneezing?

Good hygiene habits prevent and reduce the transmission of influenza and other respiratory viruses by:

- covering your mouth and nose with a disposable tissue when sneezing or coughing
- disposing of tissues properly
- washing hands frequently
- using alcohol-based hand sanitizers if hands are not visibly soiled

When sick with a fever and cough:

- stay home from work, school, church, or other daily activities outside of the home
- avoid other crowded areas or events like shopping malls or sports arenas
- do not visit nursing homes, hospitals, or other long-term care facilities
- do not visit people at increased risk for severe flu-related complications

What is the best technique for washing my hands to avoid getting the flu?

Washing your hands often is important to remove germs from your hands and stop the spread of disease. Your choices are soap and water, or an alcohol-based hand cleaner. When using soap and water, it is recommended to scrub your hands for 15 to 20 seconds. When soap and water are not available, use alcohol-based disposable hand wipes or gel sanitizers if your hands are visibly clean. You can find them in most supermarkets and drugstores. When using alcohol products, rub your hands until they are dry. The alcohol product doesn't need water to work; the alcohol in it kills the germs on your hands.

What should I do if experience flu-like symptoms?

If you are sick, you should stay home and avoid contact with other people as much as possible to keep from spreading your illness to others. If you become ill and experience any of the following warning signs, seek emergency medical care.

In children emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Not waking up or not interacting
- Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough
- Fever with a rash

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In adults, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting

Can I get swine influenza from eating or preparing pork?

No. Swine influenza viruses are not spread by food. You cannot get swine influenza from eating pork or pork products. Eating properly handled and cooked pork products is safe.

Should I keep my child home from school as a precaution?

No. Parents do not need to keep otherwise healthy children home from school unless directed to do so by local school and health officials. Children who are ill should not attend school. In this case, monitor your child for influenza-like symptoms, including fever, body aches, runny nose, sore throat, nausea, vomiting or diarrhea, and keep your child home if they are sick. You may want to contact their health care provider, particularly if symptoms are severe. Be sure to tell your doctor if you have recently traveled, especially to those areas where swine flu has already been found. Your health care provider will determine whether influenza testing or treatment is needed.

For additional questions, please contact the OSDH toll-free swine flu hotline at 1-866-278-7134, or visit our website at www.health.ok.gov.

