



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What are the differences between seasonal influenza, pandemic influenza, and swine flu?

Seasonal influenza (flu): also known as ‘common flu’ emerges every year during the cooler months. Annual flu vaccines may offer protection against seasonal flu.

Swine Influenza (swine flu) is a respiratory disease of pigs caused by type A influenza viruses that causes regular outbreaks in pigs. People do not normally get swine flu, but human infections can and do happen. There is currently no vaccine available for the Swine Flu circulating in parts of North America and Europe.

Pandemic influenza: also known as “Pandemic flu” or “Panflu” occurs when a novel flu virus causes a large number of infections on a global level. Many scientists are concerned that the novel Influenza A H1N1 virus of swine flu now circulating in parts of North America and Europe may become pandemic.

What causes Swine Flu?

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. Pigs and humans may have little or no immunity to the new or novel virus that emerges as a result of this reassortment. At this time, there are four main influenza type A virus subtypes that have been isolated in pigs: H1N1, H1N2, H3N2, and H3N1. However, the novel Swine Flu virus that is circulating in parts of North America and Europe is an H1N1 virus.

What are the symptoms of swine flu?

The symptoms of swine flu in people are similar to the symptoms of regular human [seasonal influenza](#) and include mild-high fever, lethargy, lack of appetite and coughing. Some people with swine flu also have reported runny nose, sore throat, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea.

What is this new Swine Flu everyone is talking about?

The Swine Flu in the news is really a new subtype of Influenza A (H1N1) virus of swine origin that has mutated so that it is able to transmit from human to human.

How do you catch swine flu?

Normally, swine flu is transmitted when someone comes in contact with infected pigs. However, this new strain of influenza A (H1N1) has mutated enabling it to transmit from human to human, most probably through close contact with infected individuals who do not cover their coughs and sneezes when they are ill. It can also be transmitted when one touches surfaces that have been infected by the virus and then touches their eyes, nose or mouth.

How can I protect myself?

The use of good hygiene will help decrease the chances of one becoming ill regardless of the type of illness. These include:

- Washing your hands frequently with soap and water. You may also use a hand sanitizer but it must contain at least 60% alcohol to be effective in killing viruses that cause influenza.
- Cough or sneeze into your elbow to prevent the spread of viruses transmitted through uncovered coughs and sneezes. (Dispose of tissue appropriately if used).
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth
- Stay away from people who appear to be ill or are coughing and sneezing. The recommended distance is a minimum of 3 feet (3 ft – 6 ft distance).

What should you do if you become ill?

Should you become ill, it is important to prevent the spread of illness to others. Stay home if you become ill with any of the following symptoms:

- A fever of 100 ° F (37.8 C) or more
- Sore Throat
- Cough
- Stuffy or runny nose

Should your symptoms worsen and/or an elevated fever of 102°F persists, seek medical attention.

It is recommended that you:

- Wear N 95 masks (available at local pharmacy or hardware store);
- Avoid contact with others when possible;
- Practice proper hand hygiene, cough, and sneeze etiquette;
- Stay hydrated! Water and re-hydration salts are important to maintain body function.

Make sure that you get lots of rest and drink plenty of water. Avoid fluids with a high sugar content in that they may weaken the immune system.

Can I get vaccinated against this new strain?

The purpose of a vaccine is to prevent illness from viruses. There is currently no vaccine for this novel viral strain. Even if a vaccine was developed, it would take 6-8 months from the time a pandemic starts and supplies may be limited. The seasonal influenza vaccine could have partial protection against swine H3N2, but not swine H1N1 viruses. Currently CDC is recommending use of the two antivirals (which are intended to treat not prevent illness); oseltamivir and zanamivir, however it should be pointed out that resistance among influenza antivirals is common, as cases have been confirmed where the antiviral were ineffective. The best prevention measures are those delineated above in the “How can I protect myself?” section. Also, if you know that you will be in an area where there is an outbreak you may want to wear a mask with a rating of N95. This may protect you from the airborne virus that is shed by infected people when they cough or sneeze.

How long would an H1N1 pandemic last?

There is no definite answer for this, however past pandemic have shown a pattern of multiple waves (periods during which community outbreaks occur across the country) of outbreaks could occur with each wave lasting 2 or 3 months. Historically, the longest waves have occurred in the fall and winter; however there is no seasonality in pandemics as they occur at any time a novel virus jumps species and becomes efficient at human to human transmission.

Can I get it from eating pork?

No, you cannot get swine flu from eating pork. Influenza is a respiratory illness transmitted through droplets expelled in uncovered coughs and sneezes. However, you should cook all meat products to an internal temperature of 160°F to ensure that any bacteria or viruses on the meat are eliminated.

How can I help my children prepare for pandemic flu?

Teach them good hygiene habits to prevent infection from all flu such as washing their hands regularly, covering coughs and sneezes, and staying away from sick people.

Is my child's school prepared for a Panflu outbreak?

Most schools districts should already have a plan in place to deal with a pan flu outbreak. Different school districts may have different plans for what to do in the event of an outbreak. Contact your children's school for information regarding their plan so that you can be better prepared.

How can I prepare for Panflu at home?

Be prepared to shelter in place (SIP), in other words, you might have to stay in your home for an extended period of time. Please review the Pandemic Influenza Checklist: Items to Stockpile, which can be found at <http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/individual/checklist.html>

Travel Advisories

At this time, CDC recommends that U.S. travelers avoid all nonessential travel to Mexico. Changes to this recommendation will be posted at <http://wwwn.cdc.gov/travel/contentSwineFluMexico.aspx>

How can I stay informed about the status of swine flu and pandemic flu?

For the most current information, visit the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention <http://www.pandemicflu.gov> and www.cdc.gov or call 1(800) CDC-INFO. Also, visit your local public health departments' website for more information on pandemic flu planning in your area.

For further information contact:

Loma Linda University Center for Public Health Preparedness at www.llucphp.org

California Department of Public Health www.cdph.gov

If you would like more information on this or any other topic in public health preparedness, please contact us via e-mail at llucphp@llu.edu, stop by our office, or call us at the number listed below.

Don't forget to visit our Web site at www.llucphp.org for other public health preparedness information.

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