
Swine Flu and You

Swine Influenza (swine flu) is a respiratory disease of pigs caused by a virus that causes regular outbreaks in pigs. People do not normally get swine flu, but human infections can and do happen. Swine flu viruses have been reported to spread from person-to-person, but in the past, this transmission was limited and not sustained beyond three people.

In late March and early April 2009, cases of human infection with swine flu 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 <http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/investigation.htm> CDC and local and state health agencies are working together to investigate this situation.

CDC has determined that this swine flu virus is contagious and is spreading from human to human. However, at this time, it not known how easily the virus spreads between 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.

Spread of this swine flu virus is thought to be happening in the same way that seasonal flu spreads. Flu viruses are spread mainly from person to person through coughing or sneezing of people with the flu. Sometimes people may become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose.

Infected people may be able to infect others beginning 1 day before symptoms develop and up to 7 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. People with swine flu should be considered contagious as long as they have symptoms and for up to 7 days after they feel better. Children, especially younger children, might potentially be contagious for longer periods.

To keep from spreading any flu the most important step is to wash your hands. Washing your hands often will help protect you from germs. Wash with soap and water or clean with alcohol-based hand cleaner. The CDC recommends that when you wash your hands -- with soap and warm water -- that you wash for 15 to 20 seconds. When soap and water are not available, alcohol-based disposable hand wipes or gel sanitizers may be used. You can find hand sanitizing products in most supermarkets and drugstores. If using gel, rub your hands until the gel is dry. The gel doesn't need water to work; the alcohol in it kills the germs on your hands. We should all try to stay in good general health, get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids, eat nutritious food and avoid close contact with people who are sick.

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. We know that some viruses and bacteria can live 2 hours or longer on surfaces like cafeteria tables, doorknobs, and desks. Frequent hand washing will help you reduce the chance of getting contamination from these common surfaces.

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 flu. 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 also work.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- If you get sick with the flu, CDC recommends that you stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.

No swine flu cases have been detected in Montana. If you become ill with flu-like symptoms, including fever, body aches, runny nose, sore throat, nausea, or vomiting or diarrhea, you may want to contact their health care provider, particularly if you are worried about your symptoms. Your health care provider will let you know if you need to be seen and tested or if it would be safer for you to stay at home and treat your symptoms.

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

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

Like seasonal flu, swine flu in humans can vary in severity from mild to severe. Between 2005 until January 2009, 12 human cases of swine flu were detected in the U.S. with no deaths

occurring. Swine flu viruses are not spread by food. You cannot get swine flu from eating pork or pork products. Eating properly handled and cooked pork products is safe.

If you have any questions about swine flu please contact the Public Health Department by calling 622-3771.

Remember to avoid swine flu or any flu:

1. Avoid close contact with people who are sick. When you are sick, keep your distance from others to protect them from getting sick too.
2. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. It may prevent those around you from getting sick.
3. Clean your hands. Washing your hands often will help protect you from germs.
4. Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs are often spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose, or mouth.
5. Practice other good health habits. Get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids, and eat nutritious food.