



Key Questions and Answers About Swine Flu

The following questions and answers related to swine flu (also known as H1N1) were prepared in accordance with materials developed by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

What is swine flu?

Swine flu is a new influenza virus causing illness in people. This new virus was first detected in people in the United States in April 2009. This virus is spreading from person-to-person worldwide, probably in much the same way that regular seasonal influenza viruses spread. On June 11, 2009, the [World Health Organization](#) (WHO) signaled that a pandemic of the flu was underway.

Why is the virus called “swine flu”?

This virus was originally referred to as “swine flu” because laboratory testing showed that many of the genes in this new virus were very similar to influenza viruses that normally occur in pigs (swine) in North America. But further study has shown that this new virus is very different from what normally circulates in North American pigs. It has two genes from flu viruses that normally circulate in pigs in Europe and Asia and bird (avian) genes and human genes. Scientists call this a "quadruple reassortant" virus.

How does swine flu spread?

Spread of the swine flu virus is thought to occur in the same way that seasonal flu spreads. Flu viruses are spread mainly from person to person through coughing or sneezing by people with influenza. Sometimes people may become infected by touching something – such as a surface or object – with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose.

What are the signs and symptoms of this virus in people?

The symptoms of swine flu virus in people include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. A significant number of people who have been infected with this virus also have reported diarrhea and vomiting. Severe illnesses and death has occurred as a result of illness associated with this virus.

How severe is illness associated with novel H1N1 flu virus?

Illness with the swine flu virus has ranged from mild to severe. While most people who have been sick have recovered without needing medical treatment, hospitalizations and deaths from infection with this virus have occurred.

In seasonal flu, certain people are at “high risk” of serious complications. This includes people 65 years and older, children younger than five years old, pregnant women, and people of any age with certain chronic medical conditions. About 70 percent of people who have been hospitalized with the swine flu virus have had one or more medical conditions previously recognized as placing people at “high risk” of serious seasonal flu-related complications. This includes pregnancy, diabetes, heart disease, asthma and kidney disease.

How does swine flu compare to seasonal flu in terms of its severity and infection rates?

With seasonal flu, we know that seasons vary in terms of timing, duration and severity. Seasonal influenza can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death. Each year in the United States on average 36,000 people die from flu-related complications and more than 200,000 people are hospitalized from flu-related causes. Of those hospitalized, 20,000 are children younger than 5 years old. Over 90 percent of deaths and about 60 percent of hospitalization occur in people older than 65.

When the swine flu outbreak was first detected in mid-April 2009, CDC began working with states to collect, compile and analyze information regarding the flu outbreak, including the numbers of confirmed and probable cases and the ages of these people. The information analyzed by CDC supports the conclusion that swine flu has caused greater likelihood of infection in people younger than 25 years of age than older people. At this time, there are few cases and few deaths reported in people older than 64 years old, which is unusual when compared with seasonal flu.

What can I do to protect myself from getting sick?

There is no vaccine available right now to protect against the swine flu virus. However, a vaccine is currently in production and may be ready for the public in October. As always, a vaccine will be available to protect against seasonal influenza. 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.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- If you are sick with flu-like illness, CDC recommends that you stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone except to get medical care or for other necessities. (Your fever should be gone without the use of a fever-reducing medicine.) Keep away from others as much as possible to keep from making others sick.