

Swine Flu update from PTH 26.10.09

The symptoms of swine flu are broadly the same as those of ordinary flu, but may be more severe and cause more serious complications.

The typical symptoms are:

- Fever [pyrexia $\geq 38^{\circ}\text{C}$] or a history of fever

AND

- Influenza-like illness (TWO OR MORE of the following symptoms: cough; sore throat; rhinorrhoea; limb or joint pain; headache; vomiting or diarrhoea) OR
- severe and/or life-threatening illness suggestive of an infectious process.

Most people who have contracted swine flu recover within a week and do not suffer complications, even without being given antiviral medication.

However, experts point out that as this is a new virus, its behaviour cannot be predicted with certainty.

Swine flu is different from seasonal flu in that most serious illnesses have been in younger age groups, as happened in all three 20th-century influenza pandemics.

A doctor faced with a symptomatic patient cannot yet predict with certainty the course of their illness and whether or not they will be in the small proportion who may become more seriously ill.

This is why antiviral medication is still being given to all those with swine flu in the UK, subject to their doctor's discretion.

High-risk groups

Some groups of people are more at risk of serious illness if they catch swine flu, and will need to start taking antiviral medication as soon as they are confirmed with the illness. Scientists are still learning more about the risk profile of the virus, but it is already known that the following people are particularly susceptible:

- people with:
 - chronic lung disease,
 - chronic heart disease,
 - chronic kidney disease,
 - chronic liver disease,
 - chronic neurological disease (such as epilepsy, multiple sclerosis and Parkinson's disease),
 - immunosuppression (whether caused by disease or treatment) and
 - diabetes mellitus,
- patients who have had drug treatment for asthma within the past three years,
- pregnant women,
- people aged 65 years and older, and
- young children under five years old.

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It is vital that people in these higher-risk groups who catch swine flu get antivirals and start taking them as soon as possible.

For most people, the illness appears to be mild and self-limiting. Cases have been confirmed in all age groups, but children and younger people seem much more likely to be affected, whereas fewer cases have been confirmed to date in older adults.

What to do if you have flu-like symptoms and are concerned that you may have swine flu:

- If you have access to the internet you can check your symptoms using the NHS Direct symptom checker:
<http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk/Sat/Topics/WizardStepOne.aspx?Host=Nhsd&SyndicationPartnerGuid=d19370ea-a100-407d-9695-b73407f701c7&TopicGuid=8c903315-a302-412a-bfae-9cb576d4b4cd>
- If you don't have access to the internet or are still concerned, call the National Pandemic Flu Service on 0800 1 513 100. For those with internet access you can log onto the website at <http://www.direct.gov.uk/pandemicflu>. The service uses a simple checklist to diagnose whether you have swine flu.
- If it is thought you have swine flu then the NPFS can give you access to free anti-viral drugs if necessary. You will be given a urn number and asked to arrange for a 'flu friend' to pick up your anti-viral drugs from a collection point.

The NPFS is intended to take the pressure off NHS Direct and GPs who have seen a surge in the number of flu-related calls and consultations.

Those who still wish to do so may contact their GP.

Certain groups are advised to contact their doctor rather than use the National Pandemic Influenza Service; these are: children under one or children whose condition suddenly gets worse and those whose condition is still getting worse after 7 days (5 days for a child) and people with serious underlying health conditions. Pregnant women can use the pandemic flu service to obtain their antivirals but should also let their midwife and GP know that they have flu.

In the meantime, take your usual over the counter cold / flu remedies to reduce fever and other symptoms, drink plenty of fluids and get lots of rest.

DO NOT go into your GP surgery, or to a hospital, as you may spread the disease to others.

If health care workers are IN CONTACT with infected patients they should follow the advice from the HPA, which is:

- Ensure you wear a facemask, plastic apron and gloves.
- Encourage patient to wear facemask.
- Advise on respiratory and hand hygiene and isolate patient.
- If caring for a patient with swine flu:
 - Healthcare staff to wear full personal protective equipment (PPE) - gown, gloves and eye protection (same procedures as for avian flu).
 - Keep number of staff caring for the patient to a minimum

For further information and sources, please visit:

<http://www.hpa.org.uk/webw/HPAweb&Page&HPAwebAutoListName/Page/1240732817665?p=1240732817665>
<http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/>
<http://www.fitfortravel.scot.nhs.uk/advice/disease-prevention/swine-influenza.aspx>
<http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/>
<http://www.fitfortravel.scot.nhs.uk/advice/disease-prevention/swine-influenza.aspx>
http://www.who.int/csr/swine_flu/swine_flu_faq.pdf
<http://www.patient.co.uk/>
<http://www.bnf.org.uk>
<http://www.dh.gov.uk>
<http://www.nhs.uk>