

Swine Flu update from PTH 15.07.09

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:

- sudden fever, and
- sudden cough.

Other symptoms may include:

- headache,
- tiredness,
- chills,
- aching muscles,
- limb or joint pain,
- diarrhoea or stomach upset,
- sore throat,
- runny nose,
- sneezing, and
- loss of appetite.

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),

continued...

- 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.

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 should I do if I think I'm infected or have been exposed?

If you have flu-like symptoms, you can check your symptoms on-line at:

<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 are still concerned, stay at home and call your GP, who will be able to provide a diagnosis over the phone. If swine flu is confirmed, ask a healthy relative or friend to visit your GP to pick up a document entitling you to antiviral medication.

They will then need to pick the medication up from a collection point your GP will advise on (a local pharmacy or similar).

In the meantime, take paracetamol-based cold 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.
- Contact GP and start antivirals - testing has shown that the human swine influenza H1N1 can be treated with the antiviral oseltamivir (Tamiflu®) and zanamivir (Relenza®). Standard treatment dose of oseltamivir in adults (age >13 years old) is 75mg bd for 5 days. Standard treatment dose of zanamivir is 10mg bd for 5 days.
- If caring for a patient with swine flu:
 - Healthcare staff to wear full personal protective equipment (PPE) - correctly fitted high filtration mask, 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>