

Swine Flu update from PTH 15.07.09

What is Swine Flu?

Swine flu is a respiratory disease caused by influenza type A (H1N1) virus infection, (Health Protection Agency (HPA), 2009) which infects pigs. It can be spread through coughing and sneezing.

What is the difference between seasonal, avian and pandemic flu?

It is important to be clear about the differences between seasonal flu, avian flu and pandemic flu. Avian flu is a disease which mainly affects birds. Seasonal flu refers to the viruses that circulate in the human population and cause widespread illness each winter. Pandemic flu occurs infrequently, when a new influenza virus emerges which is markedly different from those recently circulating in the human population, causes disease in people and spreads easily between people because they have little or no immunity to it. This could happen through an avian flu virus (such as H5N1) mutating into a different strain with greater affinity for people.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms are similar to those of the usual human seasonal flu infection: upper respiratory tract infection, fever, fatigue, loss of appetite, muscle and joint aches, sore throat, headache, and sometimes diarrhoea and vomiting.

Is it safe to eat pork and pork products?

Yes, swine flu has not been shown to be transmissible to people through eating properly handled and prepared pork or other products derived from pigs. The swine flu virus is killed by cooking temperatures 160°F / 70°C, corresponding to the general guidance for the preparation of pork and other meat.

How can I protect myself from getting swine flu from infected people?

General preventable measures are:

- Maintaining good basic hygiene, for example washing hands frequently with soap and water to reduce the spread of virus from your hands to face or to other people.
- Cleaning hard surfaces (e.g. door handles) frequently using a normal cleaning product.
- Covering your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing, using a tissue when possible.
- Disposing of dirty tissues promptly and carefully.
- Making sure your children follow this advice.

What should I do if I think I have swine flu?

The Health Protection Agency strongly advises that if you suspect that you have swine flu to contact your doctor by telephone, explain why you think you have swine flu. **DO NOT** go into the surgery and stay at home to minimise spread. The recommended period of time to stay off work is 5 – 7 days from onset (DoH); treatment will be administered by your GP or NHS Direct.

Is there anyone who shouldn't get a flu jab?

There are very few people who cannot receive influenza vaccine. The vaccines should not be given to those who have had a confirmed anaphylactic reaction to a previous dose of the vaccine or any component of the vaccine (including neomycin, kanamycin and gentamicin – antibiotics which may be present in tiny amounts).

The vaccines are prepared in hens' eggs and should not be given to individuals with known anaphylactic hypersensitivity to egg products.

If a person is ill with a fever, the immunisation should be delayed until they have recovered.

Influenza vaccines will not control epidemics—immunisation is recommended *only for persons at high risk and healthcare workers*. Annual immunisation is strongly recommended for individuals aged over 6 months with the following conditions:

- chronic respiratory disease (includes asthma treated with continuous or repeated use of inhaled or systemic corticosteroids or asthma with previous exacerbations requiring hospital admission);
- chronic heart disease;
- chronic liver disease;
- chronic renal disease;
- chronic neurological disease;
- diabetes mellitus
- immunosuppression because of disease (including asplenia or splenic dysfunction) or treatment (including prolonged corticosteroid treatment);
- HIV infection (regardless of immune status).

Influenza immunisation is also recommended for all persons aged over 65 years, for residents of nursing or residential homes for the elderly and other long-stay facilities, and for carers of persons whose welfare may be at risk if the carer falls ill. Influenza immunisation should also be considered for household contacts of immunocompromised individuals.

To be prepared for the winter months, NHS employers should offer vaccination to healthcare workers who are directly involved in patient care. Employers of social care workers should consider similar action.

Where possible, pregnant women and children should receive a thiomersal-free influenza vaccine; if this is not available, a thiomersal containing influenza vaccine should be given.

For people who work in close contact with poultry on a regular basis, influenza immunisation is recommended as a precautionary public health measure. Seasonal human influenza vaccine does not protect against avian influenza, but it reduces the risk of poultry workers contracting both human and avian influenza simultaneously, and therefore also reduces the risk of a new influenza virus emerging.

The seasonal flu vaccine will give some protection against several flu viruses and can be given in addition to the swine flu vaccination.

For further information and sources please visit the following websites:

<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.who.int/csr/swine_flu/swine_flu_faq.pdf

<http://www.patient.co.uk/>

<http://www.bnf.org.uk>

<http://www.dh.gov.uk>