



SWINE FLU: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

In recent weeks, you've probably heard about the spread of the swine flu illness. Cases of the disease (officially called the H1N1 virus) have been growing in the United States. This is a rapidly evolving situation, but, as of the end of April, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) confirmed over 100 cases in the U.S., with most being reported in New York, California, and Texas. Mexico is seen as the center of this most recent outbreak with more than 150 people suspected of dying from the disease so far. With countries worldwide taking emergency measures to stop the spread of the virus, here is what you need to know about the disease and how to protect yourself.

What is swine flu? Swine flu is a respiratory disease in pigs caused by influenza. Pigs can pass the illness onto humans after contact with them. Medical experts at the CDC believe the latest disease is a new mix of pig viruses with some human and bird viruses.

How is it spread? This latest strain of swine flu appears to be contagious, spreading through human contact, from one person to the next. Flu viruses can survive for hours on different surfaces, such as doorknobs and handles, so it may be spread through contact with different

surfaces. Campuses are notorious for spreading germs because students share so many items such as desks, gym equipment, and computers.

Can you catch swine flu by eating pork or other foods? No. Although some countries are currently banning importation of all pork products, the World Health Organization says: "there is no risk of infection from this virus from consumption of well-cooked pork and pork products."

What can you do to stay healthy and avoid getting swine flu? The U.S. and other countries have warned

against travel to Mexico at this time to avoid exposure to the disease. Some colleges have canceled their study-abroad programs in Mexico. Also, the CDC recommends that you take these preventative measures:

1. Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
2. Wash your hands often to protect yourself from germs. Alcohol-based hand wipes and gel sanitizers work, too.
3. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth because this is how germs can enter the body and make you sick.
4. Get plenty of sleep, be physically



physician or campus health services immediately. A doctor can take a respiratory specimen to confirm if you have swine flu. The CDC recommends the use of oseltamivir or zanamivir for the treatment and/or prevention of infection with swine influenza viruses. Also, if you have flu-like symptoms, take the usual preventative steps so others do not catch the bug, and you can get better:

- active, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids, and eat nutritious food.
5. Develop an emergency plan as a precaution. This should include storing a supply of food, medicines, facemasks, alcohol-based hand rubs, and other essential supplies.

Is there a vaccine that will help me stay healthy? No, not for this current strain of swine flu, but the federal government is taking initial steps to prepare a potential vaccine. Vaccines for human seasonal flu do not provide protection against swine flu, according to the CDC. And, note that antibiotics are not effective in combating viral infections like influenza.

What are the symptoms of swine flu? The CDC says that the symptoms are similar to regular flu and include lethargy, fever, lack of appetite, and coughing. Those afflicted may also get a runny nose, sore throat, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea.

What should you do if you have symptoms? Visit your primary care

1. Stay home if you are sick and avoid contact with others.
2. Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw your tissues in the trash afterwards.
3. Wash your hands often with soap and water. (Alcohol-based cleaners are also effective.)
4. Drink fluids and get plenty of rest.

Keep in mind that while most people recover from common strains of flu, all cases of flu are serious, especially in those people with compromised immune systems from conditions like asthma, hepatitis, HIV, and MS. Every year, 36,000 U.S. deaths are attributed to influenza, according to the CDC.

At this stage, health officials are not sure how widespread the outbreak will be, so they are advising the public not to panic, stay informed, and keep yourself healthy.

FIND OUT MORE



Stay up to date on swine flu details by **CLICKING** on the following sites:

- > **The Centers for Disease Control**
- > **The World Health Organization**

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