



FOH SWINE FLU UPDATE – APRIL 27, 2009

Outbreaks of a novel strain of swine flu have been detected in humans in several states in the United States as well as Mexico and possibly other countries prompting the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to declare a Public Health Emergency. The formal declaration of a Public Health Emergency (PHE) is a tool that facilitates HHS' preparation and mobilization for disasters and emergencies. For example, PHEs were recently declared for flooding in North Dakota, the Inauguration, and several 2008 hurricanes.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) along with the World Health Organization (WHO) are diligently investigating the outbreaks in various states and internationally to better understand the disease and its transmission. Federal Occupational Health (FOH) medical experts have been closely following developments of the swine flu outbreak and provide this brief summary of highlights of information released by public health officials:

What Do We Know?

- The swine flu is a respiratory disease of pigs caused by type A influenza that regularly causes outbreaks of influenza among pigs.
- Swine flu viruses do not normally infect humans, however, human infections with swine flu do occur mostly after direct contact with infected animals, and cases of human-to-human spread of swine flu viruses have been documented.
- Symptoms of swine flu are nearly identical to that of regular seasonal flu – fever, sore throat, cough, muscle aches, and occasionally vomiting and diarrhea.
- The current swine flu virus is susceptible to two known commercially available antiviral drugs (Tamiflu and Relenza).
- As a result of the intensive investigation and monitoring by CDC and WHO, expect the numbers of cases identified to increase.
- Cases in the United States have been relatively mild (with no deaths compared to those in Mexico) but the reason for this difference is not clear.
- As more cases are identified, you can expect that the severity of illness may also increase.
- Because it is so new, **there is no vaccine against this swine flu** and this past year's flu vaccine does not appear to provide protection against this strain.
- The CDC is taking initial steps to begin the development of a vaccine against this strain, but a decision to do so has not been made yet. If/when that is done, it will take 4-6 months for it to become available.
- The swine flu virus is spread from person-to-person like other flu viruses through coughing and sneezing by people infected with the virus. The virus is NOT spread by eating pork meat or products.
- Identification as a swine flu influenza A virus requires sending a respiratory specimen to CDC for special laboratory testing.



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

What Should Employers Do?

- Review and update your pandemic plans as necessary.
- Keep your employees informed of where they can obtain agency-specific updates.
- Encourage employees to stay home if they are sick to avoid spreading influenza and other germs.

What Can Employees Do?

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.
- 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 are spread this way.
- Avoid close contact with sick people.
- If you get sick, stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.
- Keep informed about agency-specific updates.
- If you live in areas where swine influenza cases have been identified and become ill with influenza-like symptoms, including fever, body aches, runny nose, sore throat, nausea, or vomiting or diarrhea, contact your health care provider. Your health care provider will determine whether influenza testing or treatment is needed.

How Can FOH Help?

- FOH medical consultants will follow daily updates from the CDC and other public health authorities and keep you informed of the latest updates by posting information on its website and/or sending you briefing as necessary.
- Occupational health professionals are available on a consultative basis to assess agency risk and provide recommendations.
- FOH health unit staff and EAP counselors are available to answer individual employee questions and concerns.
- **FOH HEALTH CENTERS DO NOT STOCK ANY ANTIVIRALS AND ARE NOT EQUIPPED TO DIAGNOSE OR TREAT SWINE FLU OR SEASONAL INFLUENZA.** Nurses are not licensed to dispense these medications. Employees with signs or symptoms of influenza will be referred to their health care provider for evaluation and treatment.

Additional Resources:

For more detailed information on swine flu and updated information from the CDC go to:

<http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/whatsnew.htm>

Further information on international cases may be found from the World Health Organization at:

<http://www.who.int/csr/disease/swineflu/en/index.html>