

Frequently asked questions

# Human Swine Influenza A (H1N1)

## **What is swine flu?**

Human swine influenza A (H1N1), commonly known as swine flu, is a new type of human influenza virus which causes respiratory disease. This virus is spread from person to person.

Recently, cases of human infection with this virus have been reported in Mexico, Canada and the United States of America, with spread to other countries.

## **How is swine flu spread?**

Human swine influenza is thought to be spread when infected airborne droplets, produced by coughing or sneezing by someone with the infection, come into contact with a mucous membrane (lining of the nose and mouth).

Infection may also be spread by contact with hands, tissues and other articles soiled by infected nose and throat discharges.

## **What are the symptoms?**

Symptoms of swine flu in humans appear to be similar to those produced by standard, seasonal flu. These include fever and cough, sore throat, fatigue and respiratory illness.

Like seasonal influenza, human swine flu may cause a worsening of other underlying chronic medical conditions.

## **What is the current situation?**

The situation is constantly changing so for up to date information, please visit [www.flu.sa.gov.au](http://www.flu.sa.gov.au)

## **Who is at risk?**

Those who have become unwell with fever and a respiratory illness within 7 days of returning from Mexico, the US and Canada are at highest risk of having been infected with the swine influenza virus and need further tests to exclude the disease.

## **How is it diagnosed?**

The diagnosis is confirmed by laboratory examination of mucus from the back of the nose or throat, or by blood tests.

## **What is the incubation period?**

The time between becoming infected and developing symptoms is 1 – 7 days.

## **Can it be passed to other people?**

Based on current knowledge, an infected person can spread the infection to others from one day before the onset of symptoms up to 7 days after the onset of symptoms.

## **What should I do if I have been exposed to the virus?**

Anyone who has a fever and respiratory illness and has travelled to Mexico, the US or Canada in the week before becoming unwell should go to one of the designated flu hospitals or if more than an hours drive from one of these hospitals, contact their GP or health service.

The designated flu hospitals in South Australia are:-

- Metro - Flinders Medical Centre, Royal Adelaide Hospital, children should be taken to Women's and Children's Hospital
- Country - Berri, Mount Gambier, Port Lincoln, Whyalla and Port Augusta for children, or contact your nearest hospital or health service

### **Is there any treatment for human swine influenza?**

Cases of human swine influenza can be treated with the prescription antiviral medications oseltamivir (TamiFlu®) and zanamivir (Relenza®).

There is currently no vaccine for swine flu although work is underway to develop an effective vaccine. While seasonal flu vaccine may not give protection against human swine influenza, it does provide protection against other circulating seasonal influenza virus types.

Vaccination will also reduce the overall burden of seasonal influenza in the community and, in turn, reduce the burden on our hospitals and health system.

### **Are there any restrictions on getting antiviral medication?**

South Australia has a stockpile of antiviral medication to respond to pandemic influenza. These supplies are reserved for use by people suspected of having or who have been diagnosed, with human swine influenza. They are also for people who have been in close contact with someone who is suspected of having, or who has been diagnosed with, human swine influenza. These will be provided free if it is determined by communicable disease control experts that you need them.

If you have influenza and have had symptoms for **more** than 48 hours, treatment with antivirals will have no effect, and if started earlier may reduce symptoms by about one day.

### **How do I get a prescription for antiviral medication if my doctor thinks I need them?**

Medical practitioners can write private prescriptions for antiviral medication if they consider this medication is needed. These prescriptions can be filled at retail pharmacies, but there may be delays in obtaining medication if there are limited stocks. Private prescriptions of antivirals for intending travellers (i.e. an antiviral medication prescription just-in-case some one becomes sick while they are away from home and travelling) are not encouraged.

**Appropriate prescribing of antiviral medications is important as it will help prevent depleting the supply in Australia and help prevent the development of drug resistance.**

### **If I am suspected of having swine flu and have been sent home, what should I do?**

If you are awaiting the result of tests for swine flu and have been sent home, you should follow the instructions given to you by your doctor. Further information can be found in our Fact Sheet 'For patients with suspected swine influenza'.

### **What measures can I take to prevent infection?**

General infection control practices and good hygiene can help to reduce the spread of all viruses, including human swine influenza.

Information on how to control the spread of disease through good hygiene practices can be found in our Fact Sheet 'Good Hygiene Tips'.

### **Should I wear a mask to prevent becoming infected?**

A mask can be worn by people with a respiratory illness to reduce the chance of them infecting others. It may not prevent you from getting the flu.

### **Is it safe to eat pig meat?**

Yes. There is no evidence that swine flu can be transmitted through eating meat from infected animals. Australia does not have swine flu in its domestic pigs.

### **Where can I get further advice?**

Further information and advice on swine flu can be found at the Department for Health and Ageing website: [www.health.gov.au](http://www.health.gov.au)

For more information on hygiene processes, visit SA Health's Wash Wipe Cover website: [www.health.sa.gov.au/infectioncontrol](http://www.health.sa.gov.au/infectioncontrol)

**A new, national hotline for the public to receive health information about the outbreak overseas of Swine Flu has been established. The telephone number is 180 2007.**