

April 29, 2009

What is swine flu?

Human swine flu cases in people have been reported in Canada, Mexico, the United States and many other countries. Human swine influenza, sometimes called human swine flu is a form of the influenza virus that usually affects pigs, but can also make people sick. Some severe cases of a new form of influenza have been reported in Mexico. To date, Manitoba has had no reported cases of human swine flu, and there have been no reported cases of the more severe form of the disease in Canada.

What precautions should I take?

Manitobans are encouraged to use routine precautionary measures to prevent infections:

- Cough or sneeze into your sleeve or use a tissue to cover your nose and mouth.

- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze.

- Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.

- Maintain your health by making healthy food choices, being physically active and getting enough sleep.

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

As with any flu like illness, if you develop symptoms of a respiratory infection, please do the following:

- Stay home from school or work and limit contact with others to reduce the chance of infecting them.

- Reduce the spread of germs by avoiding touching your eyes, nose or mouth and by washing your hands frequently.

- Contact your health care provider or Health Links-Info Santé at 788-8200 or 1-888-315-9257 if your symptoms get worse or you are concerned that you may need care.

What should I do if I have travelled to places where this human swine flu is found?

If you have been travelling and you do not have flu-like symptoms, you do not need to visit a health care facility or stay home from work or school. If a week has gone by since you left Mexico or other human swine flu-affected areas, and you do not have flu-like symptoms, you don't have to worry about the human swine flu.

What about protecting children?

Children should take the same precautions as adults, including washing their hands regularly and covering their nose and mouth when coughing. Young children may need help with hand washing. Children with flu-like symptoms should stay home from school or daycare. To avoid the spread of germs, routinely clean surfaces in areas where children play. If you have questions or are concerned that your child may need care, contact your health care provider or Health Links-Info Santé at 788-8200 or 1-888-315-9257.

What is being done to deal with this issue?

All regional health authorities and the provincial government are working together to respond to this situation. While this version of the influenza virus is new, the health care system handles flu cases routinely each year. As a result of this virus, health care providers are watching for people with symptoms of flu-like illness returning from human swine flu-affected areas.

Is there swine influenza in pigs in Manitoba?

Manitoba veterinarians and the pork industry are constantly monitoring for new diseases. So far, there is no evidence that this new virus is circulating in Manitoba swine herds. Swine influenza among pigs is not unusual and is not usually fatal in swine. Swine influenza has existed in Canada and Manitoba for a number of years.

Is it safe to eat pork?

Eating properly cooked pork in Canada is safe. To date, there has been no evidence that the virus is transmitted through contaminated food. Viruses (including flu viruses) are easily killed by heat, so make sure pork is always thoroughly cooked, with clear juices and no visible pinkness. Pork should be cooked to an internal temperature of 71°C.

Are people who work with pigs at risk of becoming ill with swine influenza?

Swine producers are encouraged to maintain biosecurity measures in their barns to reduce the risk of infecting their livestock. This means people who work with pigs should protect their health by changing clothes going in and out of barns, wearing masks and gloves, and washing their hands. Producers also work closely with veterinarians to keep their animals healthy.

Will this swine influenza in humans become a pandemic?

Flu viruses change over time. It is difficult to say if the current outbreak will suddenly stop, or will continue. Health officials continue to monitor the situation. Plans for pandemic and emergency responses are ready for use. For more information please visit the swine flu website at www.manitoba.ca