

Frequently Asked Questions

Swine Flu

What is swine flu?

Like other forms of influenza, swine flu is a fever-producing respiratory illness. A new strain of influenza (flu) recently identified in patients in Mexico was named "swine flu" because it is genetically related to flu viruses found in pigs. It is different from the influenza virus that circulates currently in humans. It is also different from the 1976 "swine flu" that prompted a nationwide vaccine campaign that year.

What makes this strain of influenza different than other strains?

Most influenza strains have circulated for years, which gives people a chance to build up resistances to them. This one is new, so no one has built up a resistance to it, making more people likely to get ill if exposed to it.

How bad is swine flu?

Reports from U.S. cases suggest the swine flu is behaving like any other flu virus. There is a range of illnesses, with most U.S. patients showing relatively mild disease. There are reports of a substantial number of deaths related to the swine flu in Mexico but these reports are hard to interpret, because it is unknown whether all of these patients actually died from the flu. In addition, the total number of cases in Mexico is not known, so the percentage of people who died from the flu could be relatively small.

How many cases are there in the United States?

The number of cases is changing every day. As public health officials look harder for cases, more cases are being found. Cases have been reported in Missouri or Illinois. For the most current information, visit <http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/>.

What are the symptoms of swine flu?

The symptoms of swine flu are similar to the symptoms of seasonal flu and include: fever, dry cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people have reported diarrhea and vomiting. Not everyone has every symptom.

How does swine flu spread?

It is believed that swine flu is spread from person to person the same way as seasonal flu, mainly through coughing and sneezing by infected people. Sometimes people may become infected by touching objects with the flu virus on it and then touching their nose, mouth or eyes.

Can I be vaccinated against swine flu?

At this time, there is no vaccine for the current strain of swine flu.

What can I do to keep from getting sick?

The precautions for reducing spread of swine flu are the same as for seasonal flu:

- ◆ Wash your hands often with soap or sanitizing gel.
- ◆ Stay in good general health by keeping physically active, eating right, drinking plenty of fluids, getting enough sleep and managing stress.
- ◆ Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you sneeze or cough and dispose of it right away.
- ◆ Avoid close contact with people who are ill.
- ◆ Wash or sanitize your hands before touching your nose, mouth or eyes.
- ◆ Stay home from work or school if you develop flu symptoms.

Are there medicines to treat swine flu?

Anti-viral drugs can help treat or prevent infection with swine flu virus. Anti-viral drugs are prescription medicines in pill, liquid or inhaler form that can make the illness milder and help patients feel better faster. For treatment, these work best if started within two days of symptoms.

What is the best way to keep from spreading the virus?

If you are sick do not go to work or school and limit your contact with other people as much as possible. Cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing. Put your used tissues in the waste basket. Clean your hands every time you cough or sneeze.

What should I do if I get sick?

If you live in areas where swine flu has been identified and become ill with flu symptoms, contact your healthcare provider who will determine if influenza testing or treatment is needed. Reduce your contact with others.

Can I get swine flu from eating pork products?

No, swine flu is not spread through food and you cannot get it from eating pork products. Eating properly handled and cooked pork is safe.

What is BJC doing about swine flu?

BJC HealthCare is working closely with public health officials to protect our patients and employees. We have done significant amounts of planning over the past several years to prepare for this type of event. We are constantly monitoring the situation and adjusting to any new developments. We will continue to communicate with our employees, doctors and patients.

How long can an infected person spread swine flu to others?

Infected people may be able to infect others beginning one day before symptoms develop and up to seven or more days after becoming sick. That means that you may be able to pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick. Children, especially younger children, might be contagious for longer periods.

How long can viruses live outside the body?

Some viruses and bacteria can live two hours or longer on surfaces. Frequent handwashing will help reduce the chance of getting contamination from surfaces.

What is the best technique for washing my hands to avoid getting the flu?

Washing your hands often will help protect you from germs and viruses. Wash with soap and water or clean with alcohol-based hand cleaner. Wash or rub hands for 15 to 20 seconds.

For additional information:

CDC - <http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/>

Federal Government - <http://www.pandemicflu.gov/>

BJC Emergency Preparedness Intranet site-

<http://bjcnetnew.carenet.org/sites/riskmanagement/default.aspx>