

H1N1 INFLUENZA A (HUMAN SWINE FLU) Q & A

What is H1N1 Influenza A (Swine Influenza(Swine Flu))?

The virus called H1N1 Influenza A (Swine Flu) is a new strain of Influenza A which can be transmitted from person to person. New strains of seasonal influenza A circulate every year in flu season.

How does influenza spread?

H1N1 Influenza A (Swine Flu) is thought to spread from person to person through "droplets" that are released through the air when an infected person coughs and sneezes. The droplets can be breathed in by others and can also remain on hard surfaces like counters and doorknobs where they are picked up on hands and spread when someone touches their eyes, mouth and/or nose.

H1N1 Influenza A (Swine Flu) spreads the same way as other influenza.

What are the symptoms of H1N1 Influenza A (Swine Flu) in humans?

In countries outside of Mexico, including Canada, symptoms of H1N1 Influenza A (Swine Flu) in people are similar to the symptoms of regular human seasonal influenza infection. They include fever, cough, muscle aches, lethargy, and lack of appetite. Some people with Swine Flu have also reported runny nose, sore throat, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea. The vast majority of cases outside Mexico recover completely.

The current outbreak in Mexico seems to be associated with pneumonia and other severe lung problems, as well as the milder forms of influenza.

How is H1N1 Influenza A (Swine Flu) diagnosed?

People with mild symptoms generally do not require testing. If the doctor feels your symptoms could be due to influenza, a nose or throat swab may be done and sent to the lab for confirmation. Routine or seasonal influenza is quickly confirmed this way; Swine Influenza diagnosis will take more time. Other tests such as bloodwork may also be ordered.

Is there a vaccine to protect against H1N1 Influenza A (Human Swine Flu)?

Currently there is no vaccine to protect against H1N1 Influenza A (Human Swine Flu) virus. The seasonal influenza immunization will not protect against H1N1 Influenza A (Swine Flu).

Can you get H1N1 Influenza A (Human Swine Flu) from eating pork?

No - proper cooking of pork products would kill any viruses. Additionally, swine (pigs) exhibiting symptoms of influenza would not pass tests to enter into the food market. Those handling raw pork should follow usual food hygiene practices.

Has there been a travel advisory issued for people traveling to Mexico?

Yes. As of April 27, 2009, the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) is recommending that Canadians avoid any non-essential travel to Mexico. If travel to Mexico is unavoidable, PHAC advises Canadians to make sure they receive influenza vaccinations, wash their hands regularly, and avoid contact with people who appear to have a respiratory illness.

What do I do if I've been to Mexico and I have symptoms of a respiratory infection?

If you have recently been to Mexico and have symptoms of a respiratory infection with a fever greater than 38 C and a new cough, you should stay at home and practice self-care.

In particular, rest and avoid contact with others until the symptoms have resolved.

For more information about self-care visit www.health.Alberta.ca/health-info/influenza-how-to-care.html
or call Alberta Health Link for information at 1 (866) 408-5465.

If your symptoms are severe or not improving, call your physician to request an appointment, and make sure to tell him/her about your travel history when making the appointment.

If the doctor sends you home, you should stay home until the symptoms have resolved. If you later become short of breath or develop other symptoms of severe illness, you should contact your physician or go to an Emergency Department and make sure you inform all healthcare workers of your travel history.

If you require Emergency Department care, immediately tell the triage nurse that you have respiratory symptoms and have recently traveled.

What if I have returned from travel:

(i) more than 10 days ago and have not been ill?

You are at no increased risk and no further action is required.

(ii) developed symptoms more than 10 days after having returned?

Your illness is likely locally acquired and you can continue with your usual self care measures.

What is the incubation period for H1N1 Influenza A (Swine Flu)?

The incubation period is probably short; no longer than 10 days.

Can I get antivirals if I have symptoms of influenza?

Generally, antivirals are not used or recommended for mild influenza. Antivirals must be prescribed by a physician.

Do people with symptoms need to be tested?

It is not necessary for those with mild illness to be tested. For those with more severe symptoms, consult your physician who will assess and test if needed.

Where do I get more information?

The general public should be referred to the Alberta Health Services web site for information: <http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/> Or to speak to a registered nurse 24 hours a day, seven days a week by calling: Alberta Health Link toll free at 1-866-408-LINK (5465). Mandarin Health Link 403-943-1554, Cantonese Health Link 403-943-1556

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