

## What is swine flu?

Influenza is a respiratory disease caused by viruses that infect the breathing passages. Some influenza viruses infect only humans, others prefer to infect pigs, while yet others prefer to infect birds.

The new influenza virus that was first detected in Mexico and southern California in April 2009 appears to be made up of parts of influenza viruses that come from pigs, birds, and humans.

New influenza viruses that infect humans can spread rapidly because no one is immune.

## What are the symptoms?

Influenza, including swine flu, typically causes symptoms of fever, headache, chills and cough, loss of appetite, muscle aches and fatigue, runny nose, sneezing, watery eyes and throat irritation.

Nausea, vomiting and diarrhea may occur in adults as well as in children.

Influenza may cause worse illness in persons with underlying chronic medical conditions, such as heart or lung disease.

Sometimes complications such as pneumonia develop, including severe respiratory illness and death.

## How is influenza transmitted?

Influenza, including swine flu, is spread from person to person by direct personal contact, and through droplets that are coughed or sneezed from an infected person.

It can also be spread indirectly through contaminated surfaces, such as desks, hand-rails, and objects used by an infected person. The viral particles can get on the hands of another person and be put into his or her eyes or nose. This type of transmission can be avoided by proper hand washing or use of a hand sanitizer.

## How long can an infected person spread influenza to others?

Infected people may be able to infect others beginning one day before becoming sick and up to seven days after.

Younger children might be contagious for some days longer.

## Can swine flu be transmitted by eating pork?

Swine influenza viruses are not spread by food. You cannot get swine flu from eating pork or pork products. As per normal, prepare and cook pork safely.

## Can swine flu be treated?

Influenza, including swine flu, can be treated using antiviral medications that are prescribed by your doctor. Treatment is most effective if started on the first or second day of illness.

## How can one prevent the spread of influenza in humans?

The federal government will be deciding on the best approach in terms of developing a vaccine specific to this new influenza virus.

As would be the case normally during the cold and influenza season, your own health practices are important:

1. Wash your hands or use hand sanitizer. It is important to wash with soap under warm running water for at least 15 seconds. Alcohol-based hand gel can also be used if soap and water are not available, and hands are not visibly dirty. It's a good idea to keep some with you in your pocket or purse when you travel.
2. Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth to prevent viruses from entering into your body.
3. Try to avoid close contact with sick people. Ill people should not go to work, school or large gatherings in public places. If you have to see a doctor, call ahead to the office, or tell the receptionist right away that you think you may have influenza.
4. Practice proper cough and sneeze etiquette. Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it. Wash your hands.
5. Monitor your health after return from travel for at least one week. If you develop influenza-like symptoms when you return to Canada, you should seek medical attention immediately. Tell the health care provider who sees you that you have been travelling to Mexico, California, Texas, or other areas where swine flu cases were reported

## Links

Public Health Agency of Canada: [http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/alert-alerte/swine\\_200904-eng.php](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/alert-alerte/swine_200904-eng.php)

U.S. CDC: <http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/>

World Health Organization: <http://www.who.int/en/>

Ministry of Health & Long Term Care: <http://www.health.gov.on.ca/>



Photo: CDC/ Brian Jud

**Questions? Call Sally at extension 356, Cathy at extension 236 or Pat at extension 229**