

SWINE INFLUENZA: Information for Nova Scotians

What is swine influenza?

Swine Influenza (swine flu) is a respiratory disease of pigs caused by type A influenza that regularly causes outbreaks of influenza among pigs. Swine flu viruses do not normally infect humans. However, human infections with swine flu do occur, and cases of human-to-human spread of swine flu viruses have been documented.

How is the swine influenza virus spread?

At this time the virus is contagious to humans, however, it is not known how easily the virus spreads between people.

Coughs and sneezes release the germs into the air where they can be breathed in by others.

Germs can also rest on hard surfaces like counters and doorknobs, where they can be picked up on hands and transmitted to the respiratory system when someone touches their mouth and/or nose.

What are the symptoms of swine influenza?

The symptoms of swine influenza include:

- Fever
- Fatigue
- Lack of appetite
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Body aches/headache
- Chills/fatigue
- Vomiting and diarrhea (in some cases)

What is the treatment?

Because swine influenza is caused by a virus, antibiotics are not effective. Antiviral medications can sometimes help lessen influenza symptoms, but require a prescription.

What should I do if I have been diagnosed with swine influenza?

You should stay home from work, school, public places and other social settings. Avoid close contact with others for seven days after your symptoms started. This is the time when the illness can be spread to others.

If I have swine influenza, can I spread the infection to others?

Yes. To avoid spreading disease:

- Wash your hands often or use hand sanitizer.
- Do not share drinking glasses or eating utensils.
- Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue or your elbow.
- Stay home when you are sick.

If I've been to the affected areas of Mexico and/or US or have been in contact with someone who has swine influenza, and I'm feeling sick, what should I do?

If you have recently been to the affected areas of Mexico and are exhibiting symptoms of a respiratory illness, isolate yourself (keep away from others), and get in contact with your health care professional to discuss your symptoms. Make sure to tell your health care professional about your travel history.

If I have travel plans to Mexico, what should I do?

Public Health in Nova Scotia is encouraging all travelers going to Mexico to be vaccinated for influenza if they have not received the vaccine this influenza season (November 2008 – present). Public Health Agency of Canada has issued travel notices for the affected regions of the US and Mexico. This information can be found at www.phac-aspc.gc.ca.

Is this the next influenza pandemic?

Pandemic influenza is defined as a new influenza virus that spreads easily between humans. The H1N1 swine influenza that has been identified appears to be a new virus, and there is some evidence of human-to-human transmission.

However, more investigation and information is needed to determine the severity of the disease and the ease with which it can spread. These investigations are ongoing.

Can you get human swine flu from eating pork?

No. Proper cooking of pork products would kill any viruses.