

Independent Guide

What is "Swine flu" or Swine influenza?



Independent workplace compliance

"What is Swine Flu?"

Swine flu is a contagious disease of animals caused by viruses that normally only infects pigs. Swine influenza viruses are specific to pig species but have, on rare occasions, crossed the species barrier to infect humans. Infection with swine influenza has been detected in humans since the 1950s, but they are occasional and until this outbreak, none have been reported in the UK for over 10 years.

What are the implications for human health?

The first is the risk of direct infection when viruses pass from pigs to humans, resulting in disease and, in some cases, death. The second and far greater risk is that given enough opportunities, the virus will change its form and instead of being rarely infectious for humans, will gain the ability to spread from person to person. Such a change could mark the start of a global outbreak (a pandemic).

Is it safe to eat Pig meat?

As always, provided the pigs remain disease-free and proper safe food practices and cooking are undertaken, no problems should arise from the meat, pork, bacon, ham etc. or associated products.

What are the symptoms of swine influenza?

The symptoms are similar to those of regular human seasonal influenza infections and include fever, lack of appetite, coughing, fatigue and a sore throat. Some people have also reported suffering from diarrhoea and vomiting.

Are there drugs available for treatment?

Testing indicates two antiviral drugs are available that can treat swine flu H1N1, these are known as tamiflu and relenza. The UK government has a stock of anti-viral drugs against the contingency of a pandemic flu outbreak.

What can I do to reduce the risks personally?

If a pandemic does occur, you can reduce the risks of catching or spreading influenza, including Swine flu, by adhering to the following good hygiene practices:

- When you sneeze or cough make sure that, if possible, you cover both your nose and mouth with a good quality tissue, and make sure that these tissues are then promptly and carefully placed in a bag before binning them. Wherever possible, avoid non-essential travel and contact with large crowds.
- Focus on maintaining good basic hygiene, for example washing your hands frequently with soap and water, to reduce the spread of the virus from your hands to your face, surfaces or other people (this means lathering the hands with the soap for at least 20 seconds before rinsing off).
- Make sure that any hard surfaces that people touch which may be contaminated, such as kitchen worktops, door handles, lift buttons, tap handles etc. are frequently and properly cleaned, using normal cleaning products and disinfectant.
- Make sure that your children also follow the above advice.

Advice from the Health Protection Agency for travellers

If you do have recently visited one of the countries or areas where human swine influenza has been identified, it is important for you to monitor your health closely for seven days following your visit to this area. There is no need for you to isolate yourself from other people as long as you are feeling well. If, during this period, you develop a fever accompanied by one or more of, a cough, a sore throat, headache or muscle aches you should stay at home and contact your GP by phone or contact NHS Direct (0845 4647).

Advice you receive should include

- Stay at home and rest.
- Take medicine such as aspirin, ibuprofen or paracetamol to relieve the symptoms (following the instructions with the medicines). (Please note that children under 16 must not be given aspirin or ready-made flu remedies containing aspirin.). Also remember your personal circumstances or that of other members of your family may exclude the use of some or all of these products. You should discuss this with your GP.
- Drink plenty of fluids.



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The Department of Health has stated that in the event of a flu pandemic, including Swine Flu, more information will be made available to the public through leaflets, websites and the media.

For further information on Pandemic Flu – Workplace Guidance from the Health & Safety Executive see:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pandemic-flu-checklist-for-businesses>

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/biosafety/diseases/pandflu.htm>

This guide is of a general nature; specific advice can be obtained from Assurity Consulting. Assurity Consulting is the UK's leading independent compliance consultancy specialising in workplace health, safety and environmental solutions. We have over 30 years' experience of helping customers of all sizes, from across all sectors, manage their compliance responsibilities, making sure that their organisation is compliant, their employees are safe, their processes are cost effective and their management team is in control.



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