Swine Influenza A (H1N1) Virus Information

A public health emergency has been declared following the outbreak of the swine flu in Mexico. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), a public health emergency is an occurrence or imminent threat of illness or health conditions caused by bioterrorism, epidemic or pandemic disease, or highly fatal infectious agents or toxins that pose serious risk to a significant number of people. It should be noted that emergency declarations are standard procedures in the United States to alert the public of potential sources of disruption.

On April 29, 2009, WHO raised the level of the influenza pandemic alert from Phase 4 to Phase 5 - characterized by human-to-human spread of the virus into at least two countries in one WHO region. While most countries will not be affected at this stage, the declaration of Phase 5 is a strong signal that a pandemic is imminent and that the time to finalize the organization, communication, and implementation of the planned mitigation measures is short.

Frequently asked questions regarding swine influenza

- What are the symptoms?
  Symptoms of the swine flu are similar to those of the seasonal flu: fever and respiratory illness (cough, sore throat, runny nose), headache, muscle aches, and in some cases, vomiting and diarrhea. These symptoms can be exacerbated by underlying chronic medical conditions or bacterial infections.

- How long is an individual infectious?
  An individual who has the virus can be infectious beginning one day before and lasting seven days after the onset of symptoms, possibly longer if symptoms persist. Any individuals with confirmed or suspected cases are urged to stay at home for first seven days of illness, leaving only to obtain medical care.

- How does the virus spread?
  Much like the seasonal flu, the swine influenza virus is spread from person to person through coughing or sneezing. Touching objects that have been exposed to the virus and then touching the nose, mouth, or eyes can result in infection. (Viruses can live two hours or longer on certain surfaces.)

- How can I prevent getting or spreading the virus?
  Drink plenty of fluids and eat nutritious foods. Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when sneezing or coughing and then promptly dispose of the tissue. Wash hands frequently using soap and water or alcohol-based cleaners. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth. Avoid contact with those who are sick. If interaction is necessary, wear gloves, a mask, and protective eyewear. If you feel like you may be getting sick, do not go to work or school. Stay at home and contact your doctor.

- Can you get the virus from eating pork or pork products?
  No, the virus is not spread through food, although all meat should be cooked thoroughly.

- If I received a flu shot, am I protected from the virus?
  At this time, the full effects of flu shots against the swine influenza virus are not known. Scientists have determined that the virus is resistant to common influenza medicines that prevent the replication of the virus in cells, such as amantadine (Symmetrel) and rimantadine (Flumadine). However, medicines such as zanamivir (Relenza) and oseltamivir (Tamiflu) that block the enzyme which releases the virus from infected cells have show signs of effectiveness.

For more information, please visit the following websites:
  Centers for Disease Control and Prevention - www.cdc.gov/swineflu

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