

Virginia Department of Health
Q & A for Swine-Origin Influenza A (H1N1)

What is Swine-Origin Influenza A (H1N1)?

This is a new strain of the influenza A (H1N1) virus that has not previously been seen in humans. It causes fever and respiratory illness. The new strain combines strains from viruses that affect humans, birds and pigs. It has been called swine flu, although that is not an accurate name.

Is this virus contagious?

CDC has determined that this Influenza A (H1N1) virus is contagious and is spreading from human to human. At this time, it is not known how easily the virus spreads between people. Because this is a new virus, most people will not have immunity to it and so illness may be more widespread as a result.

Where have there been confirmed cases of H1N1?

For the most up-to-date information on the locations of confirmed cases, visit <http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/> First reports of human infection with the H1N1 virus in the U.S. occurred in late March and early April 2009 in Southern California and near San Antonio, Texas.

What is Virginia doing to plan and respond?

The Virginia Department of Health routinely monitors influenza like activity (ILI). With recent national occurrences of this illness, we have asked health care providers to be alert to symptoms and are requesting ongoing testing of ILI by sentinel physicians. VDH has asked health districts to assist local clinicians in testing of any individuals meeting the CDC's case definition. We requested additional courses of antiviral medications from the Strategic National Stockpile to add to our current supply, and we have begun receiving those shipments.

Does Virginia have a plan?

The state pandemic flu response plan has been activated including an Incident Command Structure and Emergency Coordination Center at VDH. The plan has been tested and exercised six times since August 2006. Local health districts are activating their local response plans and coordinating with local and regional governments.

What are the symptoms of the swine-origin Influenza A (H1N1) in humans?

Symptoms in people are similar to the symptoms of regular human flu and include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people have reported vomiting and diarrhea. Like seasonal flu, Influenza A (H1N1) may cause a worsening of underlying chronic medical conditions.

Can people catch this flu from eating pork?

No. The virus is not transmitted by food. You cannot get infected by eating pork or pork products. Eating properly handled and cooked pork and pork products are safe. Cooking pork to an internal temperature of 160°F kills bacteria and viruses.

How does H1N1 flu spread?

Spread of this influenza virus is thought to be happening in the same way that seasonal flu spreads. Flu viruses are spread mainly from person to person through coughing or sneezing of people with influenza. Sometimes people may become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose. (4/30/09)

What is the test to determine infection?

Your doctor will use a special swab to collect fluid from the upper part of the inside of your nose. The specimen is then sent to the Virginia Division of Consolidated Laboratory Services for laboratory testing and identification.

Are there medicines to treat H1N1 flu?

Yes. CDC recommends the use of oseltamivir or zanamivir for the treatment and/or prevention of infection. These antiviral drugs are prescription medicines (pills, liquid or an inhaler) that fight against the flu by keeping flu viruses from reproducing in your body. If you get sick, antiviral drugs can make your illness milder and make you feel better faster. They may also prevent serious flu complications. Antivirals work best if started within two days of symptoms occurring. More information on treatment recommendations can be found at www.cdc.gov/flu/swine/recommendations.htm.

Does Virginia have antivirals?

Virginia has 770,000 courses on hand in the state warehouse and 3,000 courses in the state pharmacy. An additional 280,000 courses were requested from the Strategic National Stockpile, and about half of these have arrived.

How can I get antivirals?

Antiviral medications are prescribed for treatment of influenza, not to prevent infection. If you have flu like symptoms and are concerned, you should contact your doctor. Your doctor will be able to tell you if you meet the case definition for a suspect case of swine influenza and if so, schedule testing and appropriate treatment, which may include prescribing an antiviral.

Has anyone in the United States died from this strain of Influenza A?

Unfortunately, one death has been confirmed in Texas of a young child who was visiting from Mexico. Most patients have fully recovered or are progressing well.

Is the Influenza A (H1N1) virus the same as human H1N1 viruses?

No. This virus is a new and unique strain of the H1N1 viruses that usually circulate among humans. Therefore, vaccines for human seasonal flu would not provide protection from Influenza A (H1N1) virus.

What can people do to prevent being infected by Influenza A (H1N1)?

There is no vaccine available right now to protect against swine flu. There are everyday actions that can help prevent the spread of germs that cause respiratory illnesses like influenza:

* 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 often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hands cleaners are effective, too.

* Try to avoid close contact with sick people.

* If you get sick, CDC recommends that you stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.

* Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread that way.

It is important for people living in areas where the virus has been identified to take steps to prevent spreading it to others. If people are ill, they should stay at home and limit contact with others. People who live in these areas who develop illness with fever and respiratory symptoms such as cough and runny nose, and possibly other symptoms such as body aches, nausea, or vomiting or diarrhea, should contact their health care provider. Their health care provider will determine whether testing is needed.

When should I call 911?

During times of health crisis it is essential that people reserve the use of 911 and emergency rooms to true life threatening or serious emergencies. If ambulances become overwhelmed with calls, they will not be available for those who truly need them. If you are ill and suspect it is Influenza A (H1N1), call your doctor or local health department first to seek guidance and alert them that you are coming.

You should call 911 if the person:

* has difficulty breathing or chest pain

* has purple or blue discoloration of the lips

* is vomiting and unable to keep liquids down

* has signs of dehydration such as dizziness when standing, absence of urination, or in infants, a lack of tears when they cry

* has seizures (for example, uncontrolled convulsions)

* is less responsive than normal or becomes confused

What is VDH telling schools to do?

Local governments make decisions about school closings, not the state. Each locality in Virginia has an emergency plan. Contact your local government or school district to find out about their plan.

Guidelines and advice for the public may change as the CDC learns more about this virus. CDC has activated a hotline to answer public concerns: 800-CDC-INFO.