

Information for Patients

Swine Influenza

Swine influenza is a respiratory disease normally found in pigs but human cases can and do happen.

The current human cases were first reported in Southern California and Texas. Cases of swine influenza have now been confirmed in several countries including Mexico, US, Canada, Spain and the United Kingdom.

Transmission of this new swine influenza virus is thought to occur in the same way as seasonal flu. Antiviral drugs are available which can effectively prevent and treat the infection, most reported cases of this infection outside of Mexico have recovered fully without the need for medical attention or antivirals.

The Health Protection Agency is monitoring this situation closely. Further information is available from www.hpa.org.uk and will be updated regularly.

On Monday April 27 2009 the World Health Organization (WHO) raised its pandemic alert level to Phase 4. Phase 4 indicates a significant increase in risk of a pandemic ***but does not necessarily mean that a pandemic is a forgone conclusion.***

The appearance of confirmed cases in the UK and Europe is not unexpected. In addition to the Mexican cases there have been cases reported in various parts of the US, Canada and New Zealand so the likelihood that it would come here was always high.

Outside of Mexico the majority of cases have been mild and cases have responded positively to antiviral treatment. Although there has been a high number of a deaths associated with the Mexican outbreak there have not so far been any deaths reported elsewhere.

Advice for returning travellers.

If you have recently visited one of the countries or areas where human cases of influenza have been identified, it is important for you to monitor your health closely for seven days after your visit to the affected area. There is no need for you to isolate yourself from other people as long as you remain well.

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If during this period you develop a feverish illness accompanied by one or more of cough, sore throat, headache and muscle aches, you should stay at home and contact your GP by phone or seek advice from NHS Direct (0845 4647). You should make sure that you tell those from whom you are seeking advice about your recent travel to an area affected. Depending on your symptoms you may be advised that further investigations may be necessary.

General infection control practices and good respiratory hand hygiene can help to reduce transmission of all viruses, including the human swine influenza. This includes:

- Covering your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing, using a tissue when possible
- Disposing of dirty tissues promptly and carefully
- Maintaining good basic hygiene, for example washing hands frequently with soap and water to reduce the spread of the virus from your hands to face or to other people
- Cleaning hard surfaces (e.g. door handles) frequently using a normal cleaning product
- Making sure your children follow this advice

Travel advice to Mexico updated

28 April 2009

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) is now advising against all but essential travel to Mexico.