

Kananaskis Improvement District
Bulletin ONE

Swine Influenza – Questions and Answers
April 28, 2009/1130h

Background

Swine influenza has been recognized as the cause of respiratory illness including some severe illness in Mexico. Related cases of Swine Flu have been recognized in many countries, including Canada.

Swine flu illness outside Mexico has been mild to date much like usual seasonal influenza.

What is 'Swine influenza' (swine flu)?

The virus which is called 'swine flu' is a new strain of influenza A which can be transmitted from person to person. New strains of seasonal influenza A circulate every year in flu season.

How does influenza spread?

Human-to-human spread of swine influenza is thought to happen the same way as seasonal influenza and other respiratory infections. When the infected person coughs and sneezes, the viruses are released into the air where they can be breathed in by others. Viruses can also remain on hard surfaces like counters and doorknobs, where they can be picked up on hands and spread when someone touches their eyes, mouth and/or nose.

What are the symptoms of swine influenza in humans?

In countries outside of Mexico, including Canada, symptoms of swine influenza in people are similar to the symptoms of regular human seasonal influenza infection and include fever, cough, muscle aches, lethargy, and lack of appetite. Some people with swine influenza have also reported runny nose, sore throat, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea. The vast majority of cases outside Canada recover completely.

The current outbreak in Mexico seems to be associated with pneumonia and other severe lung problems, as well as the milder forms of influenza.

What is the incubation period for swine influenza?

The incubation period is probably short; no longer than 10 days.

How long is a person contagious if they develop swine influenza?

The infectious period for a confirmed case of swine influenza is defined as 1 day prior to the onset of illness in the case to 7 days after the onset of illness.

How is swine influenza diagnosed?

People with mild symptoms generally do not require testing. If the doctor feels your symptoms could be due to influenza, a nose or throat swab may be done and sent to the lab for confirmation. Routine or seasonal influenza is quickly confirmed this way; swine influenza diagnosis will take more time. Other tests such as bloodwork may also be ordered.

Is there a vaccine to protect against human swine influenza?

Currently there is no vaccine to protect against human swine influenza virus. The seasonal influenza immunization will not protect against swine influenza.

Can I still receive this seasons' influenza vaccine?

At this time, the incidence of seasonal influenza disease in Alberta is decreasing. With the exception of individuals travelling out of country, there is currently no recommendation to continue immunizing eligible individuals with this season's influenza vaccine. Clients who are insistent on receiving vaccine and meet this season's eligibility can be referred to their local Public Health Center.

Are cases of human swine influenza common in Canada?

Human swine influenza cases are not common in Canada. This new strain of influenza is being closely monitored in Canada. Cases have now been confirmed in Canada and in Alberta.

Can you get human swine influenza from eating pork?

No, proper cooking of pork products would kill any viruses. Additionally, swine (pigs) exhibiting symptoms of influenza would not enter the food market. Those handling raw pork should follow usual food hygiene practices.

Has there been a travel advisory issued for people travelling to Mexico?

PHAC is currently recommending travellers from Canada postpone elective or non-essential travel to Mexico until further notice. PHAC and the World Health Organization continue to monitor the situation in Mexico. PHAC advisories are available at: <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/tmp-pmv/pub-eng.php>

Travellers who must travel to Mexico should follow the same precautionary measures that are always recommended to protect against seasonal influenza, frequent hand washing, covering coughs and sneezes, try to minimize contact with other people and try to avoid contact with people who appear to have a respiratory illness. These travellers also need to frequently monitor the PHAC website, the [Mexican Ministry of Health](#) and the [World Health Organization](#) for updates on the situation and recommendations.

What do I do if I've been to or I'm going to Mexico and I develop symptoms of a respiratory infection?

1. While on travel:

Seek medical care. A list of physicians can be obtained through the nearest Canadian Embassy or consulate. A listing of these establishments can be access through the website of the [Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade](#).

2. When back in Canada:

If you have recently been to Mexico and develop symptoms of a respiratory infection with a fever greater than 38 C and a new cough within 10 days of your departure from Mexico, you should stay at home and practice self-care, in particular rest and avoid contact with others until the symptoms have resolved. For more information about self-care visit <http://www.health.Alberta.ca/health-info/influenza-how-to-care.html> or call Alberta Health Link for information at 1 (866) 408-5465.

If your symptoms are severe or not improving, call your physician to request an appointment, and make sure to tell him/her about your travel history when making the appointment.

If the doctor sends you home, you should stay home until the symptoms have resolved. If you later become short of breath or develop other symptoms of severe illness, you should contact your physician or go to an emergency department and make sure the healthcare workers there are informed of your travel history.

If you require Emergency Room care, tell the triage nurse when you arrive that you have respiratory symptoms and have recently traveled.

What if I have returned from travel:

(i) more than 10 days ago and have not been ill?

You are at no increased risk and no further action is required.

(ii) and developed symptoms more than 10 days after having returned?

Your illness is likely locally acquired and you can continue with your usual self care measures.

What if I have been in contact with a traveller who has been sick within 10 days of their return to Canada?

If you are well, no further action is needed. Monitor yourself for symptoms of influenza illness, practice self care at home and consult your physician as necessary.

If you have new symptoms of a respiratory infection with a fever greater than 38 C and a new cough, you should stay at home and practice self-care, in particular rest and avoid contact with others until the symptoms have resolved. For more information about self-care visit

<http://www.health.Alberta.ca/health-info/influenza-how-to-care.html> or call Alberta Health Link for information at 1 (866) 408-5465.

If your symptoms are severe or not improving, call your physician to request an appointment, and make sure to tell him/her about your contact with someone who travelled when making the appointment.

If the doctor sends you home, you should stay home until the symptoms have resolved. If you later become short of breath or develop other symptoms of severe illness, you should contact your physician or go to an emergency department and make sure the healthcare workers there are informed of your contact with someone who travelled.

If you require Emergency Room care, tell the triage nurse when you arrive that you have respiratory symptoms and have had contact with someone who recently traveled.

If I have recently returned from Mexico and I have no symptoms, do I need to stay home from work or school etc.?

If you are well, no further action is needed. You can go to work/school etc. however monitor yourself for symptoms of influenza illness, practice self care at home and consult your physician as necessary. Stay home if you develop respiratory symptoms within 10 days of returning from Mexico.

Can I get antivirals if I get symptoms?

Antivirals must be prescribed by a physician. Generally, antivirals are not indicated for mild influenza.

Do people with symptoms need to be tested?

It is not necessary for those with mild illness to be tested. For those with more severe symptoms, consult your physician who will assess and test if needed.

For additional information please contact the Kananaskis Emergency Services Centre at 403 591-7755.