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PINELLAS COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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Key Facts About Swine Flu

What is Swine Influenza?

Swine Influenza (swine flu) is a respiratory disease of pigs caused by type A influenza virus that regularly causes outbreaks of influenza in pigs. Swine flu viruses cause high levels of illness and low death rates in pigs. Swine influenza viruses may circulate among swine throughout the year, but most outbreaks occur during the late fall and winter months, similar to outbreaks in humans. The classic swine flu virus (an influenza type A H1N1 virus) was first isolated from a pig in 1930.

How many swine flu viruses are there?

Like all influenza viruses, swine flu viruses change constantly. Pigs can be infected by avian influenza and human influenza viruses as well as swine influenza viruses. When influenza viruses from different species infect pigs, the viruses can reassort (i.e. swap genes) and new viruses that are a mix of swine, human and/or avian influenza viruses can emerge. Over the years, different variations of swine flu viruses have emerged. At this time, four main influenza type A virus subtypes have been isolated in pigs: H1N1, H1N2, H3N2 and H3N1. However, most of the recently isolated influenza viruses from pigs have been H1N1 viruses.

Can humans catch swine flu?

Swine flu viruses do not normally infect humans. However, sporadic human infections with swine flu have occurred. Most commonly, these cases occur in individuals with direct exposure to pigs (e.g., children near pigs at a fair or workers in the swine industry). In addition, there have been documented cases of one person spreading swine flu to others. For example, an outbreak of apparent swine flu infection in pigs in Wisconsin in 1988 resulted in multiple human infections, and, although no community outbreak resulted, there was antibody evidence of virus transmission from the patient to healthcare workers who had close contact with the patient.

How common is swine flu infection in humans?

In the past, CDC received reports of approximately one human swine influenza virus infection every one to two years in the U.S., but from December 2005 through February 2009, 12 cases of human infection with swine influenza have been reported.

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SWINE FLU Q&A – Continued

What are the symptoms of swine flu in humans?

The symptoms of swine flu in people are similar to the symptoms of regular human seasonal influenza and include fever, lethargy, lack of appetite and coughing. Some people with swine flu also have reported runny nose, sore throat, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea.

Can people catch swine flu from eating pork?

No. Swine flu viruses are not transmitted through food. You cannot get swine flu from eating pork or pork products. Eating properly handled and cooked pork and pork products is safe. Cooking pork to an internal temperature of 160°F kills the swine flu virus, as with other bacteria and viruses.

How does swine flu spread?

Influenza viruses can be directly transmitted from pigs to people and from people to pigs. Human infection with flu viruses from pigs most likely occurs when people are in close proximity to infected pigs, such as in pig barns and livestock exhibits housing pigs at fairs. Human-to-human transmission of swine flu can also occur. This is thought to occur in the same way as seasonal flu occurs in people, which is mainly person-to-person transmission through coughing or sneezing of people infected with the influenza virus. People may also become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose.

What do we know about human-to-human spread of swine flu?

In September 1988, a previously healthy 32-year-old pregnant woman was hospitalized for pneumonia and died eight days later. A swine H1N1 flu virus was detected. Four days before getting sick, the patient visited a county fair swine exhibition where there was widespread influenza-like illness among the swine.

In follow-up studies, 76 percent of swine exhibitors tested had antibody evidence of swine flu infection, but no serious illness was detected among this group. Additional studies suggest that one to three health care workers who had contact with the patient developed mild influenza-like illnesses with antibody evidence of swine flu infection.

How can human infection with swine flu be diagnosed?

To diagnose swine influenza A infection, a respiratory specimen would generally need to be collected within the first four to five days of illness. However, some persons, especially children, may shed virus for 10 days or longer. Identification as a swine flu influenza A virus requires sending the specimen to CDC for laboratory testing.

What medications are available to treat swine flu infections in humans?

There are four different antiviral drugs that are licensed for use in the US for the treatment of influenza: amantadine, rimantadine, oseltamivir and zanamivir. While most swine flu viruses have been susceptible to all four drugs, the current swine flu viruses isolated from humans are resistant to amantadine and rimantadine. At this time, CDC recommends the use of oseltamivir or zanamivir for the treatment and/or prevention of infection with swine influenza viruses.

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http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/swineflu_you.htm