

Football BC Health Advisory



INFORMATION BULLETIN

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Ministry of Healthy Living and Sport
Ministry of Health Services

SWINE INFLUENZA VIRUS UNDER SURVEILLANCE

Update: 3 p.m. PST, April 30, 2009

VICTORIA – As the World Health Organization (WHO) raises the global pandemic threat level, British Columbia continues to monitor and respond to the recent spread of a novel strain of swine influenza, while working with the Public Health Agency of Canada. Five more cases of swine influenza have been confirmed for a total of 11 human cases in British Columbia. The cases have either recovered or are recovering. All of the cases have been relatively mild.

How can I stop the spread of swine influenza?

- Experts have determined that the swine flu virus can spread from human to human. However, they have not yet determined how easily the virus spreads between people.
- **Stay home** from work or school if you are sick, regardless of where you have travelled, unless directed to seek medical care. Limit contact with others.
- See a health care provider if your symptoms become worse but call ahead of time to let them know you have fever or cough illness.
- Exercise commonsense precautionary measures:
 - Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it. When you cough, do so into your sleeve if possible.
 - Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze.

How many cases of swine influenza virus are there in B.C.?

- BC Centre for Disease Control has confirmed 11 individuals in British Columbia so far have tested positive for the swine flu virus that has caused illness in the U.S. and Mexico. Specimens are also tested at the National Microbiology Laboratory in Winnipeg.
- B.C.'s confirmed cases include:
 - Eight cases in the Lower Mainland;
 - One in southern Vancouver Island;
 - One in Interior Health; and
 - One in Northern Health.
- Clinicians and public health partners across the province have increased vigilance and will continue to report unusual clusters or cases of severe respiratory illnesses, particularly in travellers returning from Mexico or the United States.

Current status of outbreak

- The WHO has stated that the situation is evolving quickly and reports that 11 countries have officially reported 257 cases of swine influenza. The U.S. has reported 109 confirmed human cases, including one infant death. Mexico has now reported 97 confirmed human cases of

infection including seven deaths, although the number of possible cases there could be significantly higher.

- Currently in Canada, there is a total of at least 33 confirmed swine influenza cases: 11 cases in British Columbia, six cases in Alberta, seven cases in Ontario and four cases in Nova Scotia. All the cases reported so far have been relatively mild.
- Confirmed swine flu cases elsewhere include: one case in Austria, three cases in Germany, two cases in Israel, three cases in New Zealand, 13 cases in Spain, one case in Switzerland, one in Netherlands and eight cases in the United Kingdom.
- The WHO has raised the level of influenza pandemic alert to phase 5, meaning there is human-to-human spread of the virus into at least two countries in one WHO region. Phase 6 would indicate a full-fledged global pandemic of influenza.
- The U.S. government has declared a public health emergency and warns that as the new virus continues to spread, more cases, more hospitalizations and more deaths are expected in the coming days and weeks.

What is swine influenza?

- Swine influenza is a respiratory disease of pigs caused by type A influenza virus that regularly causes outbreaks of flu in pigs.
- Swine influenza symptoms in people can be similar to the symptoms of regular human seasonal influenza infection and include fever, cough, headache, general aches and fatigue. Some people with swine flu have also reported runny nose, sore throat, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea.

How do people get swine influenza?

- Human infections with flu viruses from pigs can occur when people are in close proximity to infected pigs, such as in pig production barns and livestock exhibits at fairs. However, human-to-human transmission is also possible.
- Influenza and other respiratory infections are transmitted from person to person via the respiratory route. Coughs and sneezes release the germs into the air where they can be breathed in by others.
- Germs can also rest on hard surfaces like counters and doorknobs, where they can be picked up on hands and transmitted to the respiratory system when someone touches their mouth and/or nose.

Are masks effective in preventing the spread of swine influenza?

- Swine influenza is spread from person to person usually through respiratory droplets, from someone that is coughing or sneezing. Influenza is not airborne.
- The wearing of masks by affected persons will limit their ability to spread virus and that caregivers in the home might also benefit. However, the use by the general public in public, though a feature of many outbreaks, remains unproven.
- A mask on its own may not be enough to stop the spread. The best thing is to do is to cover your nose and mouth when you sneeze and wash your hands often with soap and water. It's the simplest and most effective way to prevent spreading the virus.
- For health professionals who are managing swine influenza cases in health-care facilities, N95 respirators are recommended for specific situations. Surgical masks are recommended for health-care workers as part of the national PHAC guidelines.

Can I get swine influenza from eating pork?

- No. Swine flu is not a food safety concern.
- Proper cooking of pork products would kill any viruses. Additionally, swine exhibiting symptoms of influenza would not pass tests to enter into the food market.

What if I have returned from travelling and have symptoms of a respiratory illness?

- If you have recently been to Mexico, the U.S. or any other region where swine influenza cases are being reported, and are exhibiting symptoms of respiratory illness with fever, you should get in contact with your health care professional to discuss your symptoms. Make sure to tell your health care professional about your travel history.

Will government be issuing a travel advisory?

- PHAC has issued a travel health warning for Mexico. Travellers from Canada are recommended to postpone elective or non-essential travel to Mexico until further notice.
- PHAC issued a separate travel health notice regarding swine flu in the United States and will provide updates as more information becomes available.
- The World Health Organization is monitoring the situation closely.
- Travellers should follow the same precautionary measures that are recommended to protect against seasonal influenza –practising frequent handwashing, covering coughs and sneezes, and staying home when ill. Since seasonal influenza continues across the world, for those with high risk conditions travelling anywhere in the world, a flu shot will help protect against illness due to human influenza viruses. However, it is not expected to protect against swine influenza.

Where I can find more information?

- All British Columbia updates on the swine influenza can be found at www.gov.bc.ca/swineflu.
- Public can call HealthLink BC at 8-1-1 or visit www.healthlinkbc.ca, 24 hours a day/seven days a week if they have questions/concerns, or if feeling ill.
- Learn how to protect yourself against flu at <http://fightflu.ca/howdoyoufightflu-eng.html>
- The travel health warning for Mexico issued by PHAC can be found at <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/tmp-pmv/2009/hsf-mexico-090427-eng.php>
- The travel health notice for the United States issued by PHAC can be found at http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/tmp-pmv/2009/swine_flu_cal-tex-090427-eng.php
- Additional information can be found at:
 - Public Health Agency of Canada http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/alert-alerte/swine_200904-eng.php;
 - U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at www.cdc.gov/flu/swine/investigation.htm;
 - World Health Organization www.who.int/csr/disease/swineflu/en/index.html.

