

Swine Flu - Frequently Asked Questions

The United States declared a public health emergency in response to the recent reports of swine flu. UnitedHealthcare wants to help you understand some important facts about swine flu so you may take appropriate actions to help protect yourself and your family. We also recommend the [CDC Web site](#) or contacting a medical professional for more information.

What is Swine Flu?

The virus involved in the current outbreak of swine flu is a respiratory infection caused by a type of influenza A (H1N1). It is a disease typically found in pigs (also called swine).

How Do You Catch It?

Although people do not normally get the swine flu, the virus is contagious and humans can be infected. The virus is spread from person to person by coughing and sneezing. Humans are typically contagious anywhere from one day before the start of the illness to 7 days after onset.

Note: Swine flu CANNOT be contracted from eating pork and pork products.

Who is at Risk of Getting the Swine Flu?

Since this is a new flu strain, it is likely there is no existing immunity to the virus. It is believed that everyone is at risk.

What are the Symptoms?

Swine flu symptoms are very similar to seasonal influenza and generally include fever, fatigue, lack of appetite and coughing, although some people also develop a runny nose, sore throat, vomiting or diarrhea, according to the Center for Disease Control (CDC).

How Can I Avoid Catching It?

People can take action to help prevent the spread of the virus.

- Frequent hand washing. Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also helpful.
- Avoid contact with those who are ill.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue (or your elbow) when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- Do not touch your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread that way.

How is It Treated?

The CDC suggests the anti-viral medicines called Tamiflu and Relenza for the treatment and prevention of the swine flu virus. These medications work best if taken within two days of the development of symptoms. **IMPORTANT:** Aspirin or aspirin-containing products should not be given to anyone age 18 or younger, including confirmed or suspected cases of swine flu due to the chance of Reye syndrome. Non-steroidal medicines, like acetaminophen (Tylenol) may be used to treat the symptoms.

What Should I Do If I Become Ill?

If you are ill, you should stay home and avoid being with others to help control spread of the disease.

You should also contact a doctor or nurse for urgent or emergency evaluation if you have:

- Trouble breathing or rapid breathing
- Chest pain or pressure
- Stomach pain
- Dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or frequent vomiting

In children, additional symptoms that may happen and need urgent care are:

- Inability to drink enough liquids to stay hydrated
- Fever with a rash
- Getting better, followed by a return of fever and worsening cough

Symptoms which require calling Emergency Medical Services (911) include:

- Skin color turning blue
- Not able to wake up your child
- Extreme irritability. For example, a fussy child who does not want to be held.

Does the flu shot I received earlier this year protect me? What if I got a flu shot now – would that protect me?

No. There is no vaccine for this strain of flu at this time. People living in affected areas should take steps to prevent spreading the virus to others.

If I am traveling to Mexico, should I take medicines to prevent me from getting the flu?

The CDC and WHO (World Health Organization) suggest that people avoid travel to Mexico at this time. If you are planning travel to Mexico, follow the [suggestions](#) on the CDC Web site to lower the chance of infection.

When I should I get medicines from my doctor?

Antiviral medicines are available for people 1 year or older. You should ask your doctor whether you need antiviral medicines. The CDC's recommendations for treatment are as follows:

Suspected cases: "Treatment is recommended for any ill person *suspected* to have swine flu." Five days of medication are usually recommended if symptoms have been present for no more than two days. Since some suspected cases may turn out to have other strains of flu, a doctor may prescribe other drugs in addition to Tamiflu and Relenza.

Confirmed cases: Either Tamiflu or Relenza may be administered for five days, provided symptoms have been present for no more than two days.

Pregnant women: The safety of Tamiflu and Relenza during pregnancy has not been tested. These drugs should only be used in pregnant women if it is felt the benefit outweighs the chance of harm to the embryo or fetus.

Preventive drug treatment in people who are not ill: Effective care requires a person to take the drugs for at least seven days. Preventive treatment is recommended for:

- Household members who are close to other people who are at high risk for flu complications
- School children who are close to other people with a confirmed or suspected case of swine flu
- Travelers to Mexico who are at high risk of flu complications
- Workers at the Mexican border who are at high risk of flu complications
- Health care or public health workers who have had unprotected close contact with someone who has a confirmed case of swine flu during the infectious period
- Preventive care can be considered for any health care worker who is working in an area with confirmed swine flu cases and who is likely to have problems, and non-high risk persons who are traveling to Mexico, first responders, or border workers who are working in areas with confirmed cases.

Flu infections can lead to or occur with bacterial infections. In that case, people will likely need to also take antibiotics. A long or severe case of the flu that seems to get better, but then gets worse again, may be a sign of a bacterial infection. People with concerns about the course of their symptoms should check with their doctor.

How quickly can they make a vaccine against this flu?

The answer to this question is unknown, but it may take many months to make and test a new vaccine. The current seasonal flu vaccine does not fight the swine flu virus.

How long can the virus live on surfaces?

It is known that some viruses and bacteria can live 2 hours or longer on surfaces like cafeteria tables, doorknobs, and desks.

What about the use of facemasks and respirators?

There is extensive information on use of facemasks and respirators on the [CDC Web site](#).

What advice is there for the care of a person sick with known or suspected swine flu at home?

The CDC has just [updated information](#) on the home care of a person who is ill with the swine flu at home. Things to think about:

- The sick person should not have visitors at home other than caregivers. A phone call is safer than a visit.
- If possible, have only one adult in the home take care of the sick person.
- Avoid having pregnant women care for the sick person. Pregnant women are at a higher risk of flu-related problems and resistance may be lower during pregnancy.
- Everyone in the household should clean their hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub often, including after EVERY contact with the sick person or the sick person's room or bathroom.
- Use paper towels for drying hands after hand washing or use cloth towels for each person in the household. For example, have different colored towels for each person.
- Caregivers might catch flu from the person they are caring for and then the caregiver might be able to spread the flu to others before the caregiver shows symptoms. Therefore, the caregiver should wear a mask when they leave their home to keep from spreading the disease to others, in case they are in the early stages of infection.
- Caregivers should talk to their doctor about taking anti-viral medicine to stop them from getting the illness.
- Caregivers should check themselves and household members for flu symptoms and call a telephone hotline or a doctor if they feel sick.

If I or a member of my family is ill with a flu-like illness, what can we do to prevent spread of the disease?

People who get a flu-like illness should stay at home for 7 days after they feel sick or 24 hours after the symptoms have gone away, whichever is longer. If a person wishes to seek doctor's care, they should call their doctor before traveling to their office. Those with severe symptoms (for example, trouble breathing) should seek immediate medical attention. If someone must leave their home, he should wear a facemask to lower the chance of spreading the virus. If a face mask is not available, they using a handkerchief to cove a cough or sneeze is advised. Of course, those in home isolation should wash their hands often or use alcohol-based hand gels. As a rule, hand washing should be performed for at least 15 to 20 seconds. If others at home are likely to be within 6 feet of the ill person, the ill person should wear a face mask. [More information](#) is available from CDC.

