

Key Facts about Swine Influenza in Humans

What is Swine Influenza?

Swine Influenza (swine flu) is a respiratory disease of pigs caused by type A influenza virus. 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.

How common is swine flu infection in humans?

People do not normally get swine flu, but human infections can and do happen. In the past, CDC received reports of approximately one human swine influenza virus infection every one to two years in the U.S. However, from December 2005 through February 2009, 12 cases of human infection with swine influenza have been reported. Most commonly, these cases occur in persons with direct exposure to pigs (e.g. children near pigs at a fair or workers in the swine industry).

What are the symptoms of swine flu in humans?

The symptoms of swine flu in people are similar to 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. You can not get swine influenza from eating pork or pork products. Eating properly handled and cooked pork and pork products is safe. However, there are other illnesses that you can get by not cooking pork products properly. To be safe, cook pork at an internal temperature of 160°F to kill 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 are most likely to occur when people are close to infected pigs, such as in pig barns and livestock exhibits housing pigs. 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 become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose.

How can human infections with swine influenza be diagnosed?

To diagnose swine influenza A infection, a swab from your nose would generally need to be collected within the first 4 to 5 days of illness (when an infected person is most likely to be shedding virus). 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. The most recent swine influenza viruses from humans are resistant to amantadine and rimantadine. At this time, CDC recommends using oseltamivir or zanamivir for the treatment and/or prevention of infection with swine influenza viruses.