

28 April 2009

No Swine Influenza in KwaZulu-Natal

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has reported an outbreak of Swine Influenza A (H1N1) in Mexico, United States of America, Spain and Canada. Swine Influenza (swine flu) is a respiratory disease of pigs caused by type A influenza viruses, but also affects humans. The recent outbreak has shown that person-to-person transmission is taking place and this is of particular concern to the health authorities.

As of 27 April 2009, the United States has reported 40 laboratory confirmed human cases of swine influenza, with no deaths. Mexico has reported 26 confirmed human cases, with 7 deaths. Canada has reported 6 cases with no death, while Spain has reported 1 case with no death.

To date, there are no cases of Swine Influenza reported in KwaZulu-Natal. However, adequate measures have been taken to ensure preparedness and response should any case be identified in the country. These include:

- Drafting of guidelines such as - National Pandemic Influenza Preparedness Plan, Influenza Case management guidelines
- Outbreak response team are operational in all provinces
- Training of Provincial Rapid Response Teams on Influenza pandemic preparedness and response have been conducted in all Provinces
- Heightened clinical and laboratory surveillance are in place to identify any suspected human case of Swine Influenza
- Assessment of capacity for Epidemic Preparedness and Response including Port Health services in context of International Health Regulations. Port health acts as the first line of defense by carrying the necessary screening.
- The Department of Health is collaborating with stakeholders such as the department of Agriculture and WHO.

How do you catch swine flu?

Spread of swine flu can occur in two ways:

- Through contact with infected pigs or environments contaminated with swine flu viruses.
- Through contact with a person with swine flu. Human-to-human spread of swine flu has been documented also and is thought to occur in the same way as seasonal flu. Influenza is thought to spread mainly person-to-person through coughing or sneezing of infected people.

Are there medicines to treat swine flu?

- Yes, there are drugs which are available on the advice of a clinician

How long can an infected person spread swine flu to others?

People with swine influenza virus infection should be considered potentially contagious as long as they are symptomatic and possibly for up to 7 days following illness onset. Children, especially younger children, might potentially be contagious for longer periods.

What can I do to protect myself from getting sick?

There is no vaccine available right now to protect against swine flu. There are everyday actions that can help prevent the spread of germs that cause respiratory illnesses like influenza.

Everyday steps to protect your health:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.

- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- If you get sick with influenza, limit contact with others to keep from infecting them. Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.

What should I do if I suspect I have swine flu?

The clinical presentation of swine influenza infection in humans resembles seasonal influenza and other acute upper respiratory tract infections. This includes fever, body aches, runny nose, sore throat, nausea, or vomiting or diarrhea. When you experience the above symptoms, report to nearest health facility.

Emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

In Children:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Not waking up or not interacting
- Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough
- Fever with a rash

In adults:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness

Can I get swine influenza when I eat pork?

No. Swine influenza viruses are not spread by food. You cannot get swine influenza from eating pork or pork products. Eating properly handled and cooked pork products is safe.

The Department of Health in collaboration with stakeholders is monitoring the outbreak closely and will update the public as more information becomes available.

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ENDS

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