



## **PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET**

**Boston Public Health Commission  
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# **Swine Flu**

### **What is swine flu?**

Swine influenza (swine flu) is flu virus in pigs. People do not normally get swine flu; however, as of mid-April cases of a specific type of swine flu were reported in the United States, Mexico, Canada, Europe, and Australia.

### **What are the symptoms of swine flu?**

Symptoms are similar to regular flu and include sudden fever, cough, muscle aches, headache, chills and general weakness. Some people have also had diarrhea, and vomiting. These symptoms can range from mild to severe.

### **How does swine flu spread in people?**

The current strain of swine flu is able to spread from one person to another. It spreads the same way as regular flu. The virus that causes swine flu lives in the nose and throat and is sprayed into the air when an infected person sneezes, coughs or talks. People nearby can then breathe in the virus. Sometimes people get flu by touching something with the flu germ on it and then touching their mouth or nose. Symptoms usually start 24 to 48 hours after a person breathes in the virus.

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

People can spread the swine flu virus 1 day before their symptoms begin until 1 week afterward. Children may be able to spread the virus longer.

### **Is there a vaccine for swine flu?**

No, there is not a vaccine at this time for swine flu. Experts estimate that it will take at least 13 weeks for a vaccine to be created. The seasonal flu vaccine will not protect against swine flu.

### **What can I do to protect myself against swine flu?**

- Clean your hands often with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand cleaner
- Try to stay in good health by getting plenty of sleep, drink plenty of fluids and eat nutritious food
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick, if possible

### **What should I do if I get sick?**

If you have traveled or live in areas where swine flu has been identified and you get sick with flu symptoms, you should contact your healthcare provider. Your healthcare provider can determine if you need treatment and/or a test. Generally, the flu lasts 3-7 days. Drink plenty of fluids, rest and avoid smoking. Take non-aspirin pain relievers such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen. Decongestants may help relieve a stuffy nose or sinus pressure. Talk to your doctor if symptoms seem severe or ongoing.

*Seek emergency medical care if you have any of the following:*

Children:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish skin color
- 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 by the return with fever and worse cough
- Fever with a rash

Adults:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting

### **Can I get swine flu from eating pork?**

No, swine flu is not spread through food. Eating properly handled and cooked pork products is safe

### **Are there any medications that I can take?**

Antiviral medicines (such as oseltamivir or zanamivir) are medicines that are prescribed by a healthcare provider and can treat or prevent flu. The medicines reduce the amount of flu virus in the body and can make your illness milder and make you feel better faster. They may also prevent serious flu complications. To be effective, these medicines should be started within 2 days after getting sick.

### **If I have the flu, what can I do to stop it from spreading to others?**

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue every time you cough or sneeze. Then throw the used tissue in a waste basket. If you don't have a tissue, sneeze or cough into your upper sleeve.
- Clean your hands with soap and water, especially after coughing or sneezing. You can also use alcohol-based hand cleaner.
- Do not go to work or school if sick. Stay home when you are sick. It is recommended that you stay at home (5 days for an adult and 7 days for children) after you first get sick or until symptoms have resolved, whichever is shorter.
- Try to limit contact with others to keep from getting them sick.

**For more information, please contact  
Boston Public Health Commission  
Communicable Disease Control  
(617) 534-5611 or [www.bphc.org](http://www.bphc.org)**