

1. What is Swine Flu (Swine Influenza)?

Swine flu is a respiratory disease affecting pigs that is caused by type A influenza virus. Swine influenza viruses may circulate among swine throughout the year, but most outbreaks occur during the late fall and winter months similar to influenza outbreaks in humans. It causes high levels of illness but low death rates in pigs.

2. Does Swine Flu affect humans?

Swine flu viruses that cause disease in pigs very rarely affect humans. However, sporadic human infections with swine flu have occurred. Most commonly, these cases occur in persons with direct exposure to pigs but there have also been documented cases of human-to-human spread of swine flu.

3. How does Swine Flu spread to humans?

Swine flu spreads to humans mainly through contact with infected pigs, which shed the virus in their saliva, nasal secretions and faeces. Limited human-to-human transmission can also occur in the same way as seasonal flu occurs in people.

4. Can people catch Swine Flu from eating pork?

There is currently no evidence to suggest that swine flu can be transmitted to humans from eating pork or pork products that have been thoroughly cooked.

5. What are the symptoms of Swine Flu in humans?

The symptoms of swine flu in people are expected to be similar to the symptoms of regular human seasonal influenza. An early symptom is high fever, and this is followed by cough, sore throat, runny nose, and sometimes breathlessness a few days later.

6. How can human infections with swine flu be diagnosed?

To diagnose swine flu, a respiratory specimen 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 the virus). However, some persons, especially children may shed the virus for 10 days or longer.

7. What medications are available to treat swine flu infection in humans?

There are four different antiviral drugs that are licensed for use in Singapore for the treatment of influenza: amantadine, rimantadine, oseltamivir and zanamivir. While most swine flu viruses have been susceptible to all four drugs, the most recent swine flu viruses isolated from humans are resistant to amantadine and rimantadine. At this time, the US CDC recommends the use of oseltamivir (Tamiflu®) or zanamivir (Relenza®) for the treatment and/or prevention of infection with swine flu viruses.

8. Are there any cases of Swine Flu in Singapore?

To date, there have been no human cases of swine flu detected in Singapore.

9. Is there any cause for alarm in Singapore?

No human swine flu cases have been reported in Singapore. MOH is monitoring the situation closely and will update the public should the situation change.

10. What is MOH doing to ensure that the disease is not transmitted here?

MOH maintains a comprehensive and well established disease surveillance system for the early detection of human cases of novel influenzas such as swine flu. In addition, MOH has sent a medical alert to all medical practitioners and staff in hospitals, national centres, private medical clinics and polyclinics to update them on the outbreak of swine flu in the USA and Mexico and to advise them to be vigilant for any suspect cases. When the situation warrants, MOH will step up public health measures e.g. quarantine of contacts, issue public health advisories, and work with other government agencies to screen visitors at our border checkpoints. Further, MOH has an influenza pandemic preparedness plan in response to a pandemic situation.

11. Is it safe to visit countries with cases of Swine Flu and will I be quarantined when I return? What travel precautions should I take?

There are currently no travel restrictions or quarantine advised by the World Health Organisation for swine flu. If you intend to travel to areas which have cases of swine flu (currently – Southern California and Texas in the United States; and Mexico), you should take note of the following measures to minimize your risk of acquiring swine flu:

- Avoid contact with persons with symptoms of influenza
- Avoid crowded areas and maintain good ventilation.
- Observe good personal and environmental hygiene. Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water frequently and when they are contaminated by respiratory secretions e.g. after sneezing.
- Maintain good body resistance through a balanced diet, regular exercise, having adequate rest, reducing stress and not smoking.

12. What should I do if I suspect I have swine flu after returning to Singapore?

You should consult your doctor as soon as possible and inform your doctor if you have symptoms of swine flu and had recently travelled to areas which have cases of swine flu (currently – Southern California and Texas in the United States; and Mexico).

13. What should I do if I fall ill overseas?

You should consult a local doctor as soon as possible and refrain from traveling until you are certified fit by the doctor.

14. Does influenza vaccination help in preventing Swine Flu?

Vaccines are available to be given to pigs to prevent swine influenza. There is no vaccine to protect humans from swine flu. The seasonal influenza vaccine is unlikely to protect against H1N1 swine flu viruses.

15. Is it safe to come into contact with live pigs in nature reserves and the wildlife reserves?

So far, there are no known cases of swine flu in Singapore. However, proper hygiene practices, such as washing of hands after contact with animals including pigs, should be maintained.