

Swine Influenza A Summary– April 2009

Background Information – Swine Flu (H1N1)

Influenza (or the flu) is a serious disease, and people of any age can get it. The flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. It can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death. In an average year, the flu causes 36,000 deaths (mostly among those aged 65 years or older) and more than 200,000 hospitalizations in the United States. Usually seasonal flu outbreaks occur between autumn and early spring each year.

Occasionally, a new or unusual influenza virus emerges and causes an unexpected outbreak. In the spring of 2009, an outbreak of a strain of influenza called “swine flu”(H1N1) was first reported in Mexico. By late April 2009, a growing number of people in North America, Europe, and beyond are reported to have been infected, with the spread of infections in several U.S. states.

Information changes daily concerning the 2009 outbreak of swine flu (H1N1). For the most up-to-date information, go to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at www.cdc.gov/flu/swine. You may also follow developments on the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) website at www.dhhs.gov.

The “Key Points” below are excerpted from the CDC website, the DHHS website, and the April 28, 2009 communication by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to all Medicare Part D Sponsors. This information is referenced with the understanding that a physician’s screening and treatment plan for any particular patient will be individualized. Physicians, employees, and members are encouraged to refer to these and other authoritative sources as their individual clinical situations may require. The health plans do not intend to exercise any control or direction over a treating provider’s medical judgment or clinical decisions, or to interfere with the physician/patient relationship.

Key Points

Question and Answer:

What is the swine flu (H1N1)?

- Swine Influenza (H1N1) is a respiratory disease of pigs caused by type A influenza viruses. Pigs get infected with “swine flu” every year. Humans do not normally get swine flu, but people who come into close contact with pigs can get infected.

What are the signs and symptoms of swine flu in people?

- The symptoms of swine flu in people are similar to the symptoms of regular human flu and include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people have reported diarrhea and vomiting associated with swine flu. In the past, like seasonal flu, severe illness (pneumonia and respiratory failure) and deaths have been reported with swine flu infection in people. Also like seasonal flu, swine flu may cause a worsening of underlying chronic medical conditions.

Is this swine flu (H1N1) virus contagious?

- The CDC has determined that the swine influenza A (H1N1) virus associated with the outbreak in the Spring of 2009 is contagious. It is possible for this virus to spread from human to human. However, at this time, it is not known how easily the virus spreads between people.

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 is being done about the swine flu (H1N1)?

- The White House, Health and Human Services (HHS) and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) are monitoring the situation and working with local, state, and public health agencies to gather information.

Public health officials have increased surveillance both here in the United States and in Mexico. People are asked to contact their public health office and their doctors if they believe they have been exposed to swine flu.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) are posting the latest information about the swine flu outbreak in the U.S. and Mexico on the CDC website at www.cdc.gov/flu/swine.

What can you do to protect yourself against the swine flu?

- At this time there are no travel restrictions in place for any country. Please continue to monitor the situation for any travel advisories that may be posted on the CDC website.

There are some simple steps that people can take to help prevent the spread of germs that cause diseases, including swine flu.

- 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 or anti-bacterial hand cleaners also work.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.

In the event that you get sick with the flu or a flu-like illness, it is recommended that you:

- Call your doctor or health care provider.
- Stay home from work or school.
- Stay away from others to avoid infecting them.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth, as germs spread this way.

Is there a vaccine that protects against swine flu (H1N1)?

- No – there is currently no vaccine that protects against the strain of swine flu associated with the 2009 outbreak. The swine flu strain involved (H1N1) was not included in the flu vaccine for the 2008-2009 flu season, so people that got a “flu shot” in the fall of 2008 or early winter of 2009 do not have full immunity to this virus. The H1N1 swine flu viruses are antigenically very different from human H1N1 viruses and, therefore, vaccines for human seasonal flu would not provide protection from H1N1 swine flu viruses.

The development of an influenza vaccine takes time, and U.S. public health authorities predict that a vaccine for this strain of “swine flu” will not be available for at least 6 months, perhaps longer.

How serious is swine flu (H1N1) infection?

- Like seasonal flu, swine flu in humans can vary in severity from mild to severe. Between 2005 until January 2009, 12 human cases of swine flu were detected in the U.S. with no deaths occurring. However, swine flu infection can be serious. In September 1988, a previously healthy 32-year-old pregnant woman in Wisconsin was hospitalized for pneumonia after being infected with swine flu and died 8 days later. A swine flu outbreak in Fort Dix, New Jersey occurred in 1976 that caused more than 200 cases with serious illness in several people and one death.

It is too soon for anyone to know how serious the 2009 outbreak of swine flu infection will be. Please continue to monitor the situation at www.cdc.gov/flu/swine. You may also follow developments on the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) website at www.dhhs.gov

Are there antiviral medications that treat the swine flu (H1N1)?

- Recommendations for use of antivirals may change as data on antiviral susceptibilities become available.

Antiviral treatment should be considered for confirmed, probable or suspected cases of swine influenza A (H1N1) virus infection. Treatment of hospitalized patients and patients at higher risk for influenza complications should be a top priority. Antiviral treatment with zanamivir or oseltamivir should be started as soon as possible after the onset of symptoms. Evidence for benefits from treatment in studies of seasonal influenza is strongest when treatment is started within 48 hours of illness onset. However, some studies of treatment of seasonal influenza have shown benefit, including reduced deaths or shorter hospitalization, even for patients whose treatment was started more than 48 hours after illness onset. Recommended duration of treatment is **five days**. Recommendations for use of antivirals may change as data on antiviral susceptibilities and effectiveness become available. Antiviral doses recommended for treatment of swine influenza A (H1N1) virus infection in adults or children 1 year of age or older are the same as those recommended for seasonal influenza. Oseltamivir use for children < 1 year old was recently approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) under an Emergency Use Authorization (EUA), and dosing for these children is age-based.

Are there medications I can take to reduce the chance of severe illness if I am exposed to swine flu?

For antiviral chemoprophylaxis of swine influenza A (H1N1) virus infection, either oseltamivir or zanamivir are recommended. Duration of antiviral chemoprophylaxis *post-exposure* is 10 days after the last known exposure to an ill confirmed case of swine influenza A (H1N1) virus infection. For *pre-exposure* protection, chemoprophylaxis should be given during the potential exposure period and continued for 10 days after the last known exposure to an ill confirmed case of swine influenza A (H1N1) virus infection. Oseltamivir can also be used for chemoprophylaxis.

Antiviral chemoprophylaxis (pre-exposure or post-exposure) with either oseltamivir or zanamivir is **recommended** for the following individuals:

1. Household close contacts who are at high-risk for complications of influenza (e.g., persons with certain chronic medical conditions, persons 65 or older, children younger than 5 years old, and pregnant women) of a confirmed, probable or suspected case.
2. School children who are at high-risk for complications of influenza (children with certain chronic medical conditions) who had close contact (face-to-face) with a confirmed, probable, or suspected case.
3. Travelers to Mexico who are at high-risk for complications of influenza (e.g., persons with certain chronic medical conditions, persons 65 or older, children younger than 5 years old, and pregnant women).
4. Health care workers or public health workers who were not using appropriate personal protective equipment during close contact with an ill confirmed, probable, or suspect case of swine influenza A (H1N1) virus infection during the case's infectious period.

Pre-exposure antiviral chemoprophylaxis with either oseltamivir or zanamivir can be **considered** for the following:

1. Any health care worker who is at high-risk for complications of influenza (e.g., persons with certain chronic medical conditions, persons 65 or older, children younger than 5 years old, and pregnant women) who is working in an area of the healthcare facility that contains patients with confirmed swine influenza A (H1N1) cases, or who is caring for patients with any acute febrile respiratory illness.
2. Non-high risk persons who are travelers to Mexico, first responders, or border workers who are working in areas with confirmed cases of swine influenza A (H1N1) virus infection.

Does Coventry cover the antiviral medications oseltamivir or zanamivir?

- For those Coventry commercial members who have Coventry pharmacy benefits, Coventry Advantra members covered by Coventry Advantra Medicare Part D plans and Coventry Medicaid plan members, Coventry has arranged to cover both oseltamivir and zanamivir in accordance with the current CDC recommendations for swine influenza. Members should check their formulary information for tier coverage or contact the 800

number on their membership card for more information.

Should you ask your doctor for an antiviral prescription to keep on hand should you become ill with a virus this year?

- No. Your best course of care would be to seek medical attention if you become ill. If there should be a need for antiviral, influenza medications, your physician should be the one to advise you and prescribe. He or she will be in the best position to keep abreast of the types of disease prevalent in the population and advise you appropriately.
- Purchasing and having “on hand” medications takes drugs out of the pharmacy and makes it less available to flu patients who actually need it. Additionally, inappropriate use of the drugs – for things such as a runny nose – can lead to the development of resistant viruses making the few medications available to treat serious flu syndromes less effective.

Can you get the swine flu by eating pork or pork products?

- There is nothing to show that swine flu can be transmitted through food. Eating properly handled and cooked pork and pork products are safe. Cooking pork to an internal temperature of 160° F kills bacteria and viruses.