

FAQ

Human Swine Influenza

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FAQ

Human Swine Influenza

- **About human swine influenza**

- 1 About swine flu

- 1.1 What is swine influenza?

Human Swine Influenza (swine flu) (or pandemic (H1N1) 2009) is caused by the novel Influenza A(H1N1) virus. Since its discovery in North America in April 2009, the disease has led to epidemics in many parts of the world. Like previous seasonal flu, swine flu mainly spreads from person to person via coughs and sneezes. People may also become infected by touching objects soiled with the virus and then touching their mouth, nose or eyes. The symptoms of swine flu are similar to those of human seasonal influenza and include fever, cough, sore throat, runny nose, muscle pain and headache. Some infected persons may also have nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea. It is evident that the swine flu virus has taken root in our community and become one of the major strains of influenza.

- 1.2 Will swine flu cause serious illness e.g. death?

Most cases of human swine influenza have been mild though some severe and fatal cases have been reported.

- 1.3 Will pregnancy be adversely affected if the expectant mother contracts the disease?

Pregnant women are known to have higher risk for human swine influenza complications which might affect the foetus.

- 1.4 Hong Kong is said to be affected by seasonal flu every year with lots of people falling ill. Why should we be worried about the swine flu which is after all one type of flu?

Seasonal epidemics caused by circulating human influenza strains occur every year in Hong Kong and around the world. These viruses undergo

minor genetic changes and can be prevented or their impact lessened by annual administration of seasonal flu vaccines. The swine flu virus is a new virus arising from mixing of viral genes from pigs, birds and human beings. Since it is new, the majority of Hong Kong's population has not developed immunity against it. Therefore we must strengthen the monitoring of the spread of the virus so as to respond appropriately and effectively.

2 About the international situation

2.1 What is the current situation of human swine influenza worldwide?

Cases of human swine influenza have been reported in more than 200 countries/areas around the world. Latest global situation on Human Swine influenza infection could be accessed via the CHP website at the following URL:

http://www.chp.gov.hk/en/guideline1_year/29/134/518.html

2.2 What is the significance of WHO's raising of pandemic alert level to Phase 6?

On June 11, 2009, the World Health Organization (WHO) raised the worldwide pandemic alert level to Phase 6 in response to the ongoing global spread of the human swine influenza virus. A Phase 6 alert level means that a global pandemic is underway and that there are now ongoing community level outbreaks in multiple parts of the world. The Phase 6 pandemic alert level is a reflection of the spread of the virus and outbreaks situation, not the severity of illness caused by the virus. The impact of a pandemic caused by such a virus depends on virulence of the virus, existing immunity among people, use of vaccines and host factors. The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government is keeping a close watch on international and local developments to assess and inform the public about the risk and adjust prevention and control strategies.

3 About the local situation

3.1 What about the situation of human swine influenza in Hong Kong?

The latest situation in Hong Kong can be accessed via the CHP website at the following URL:

http://www.chp.gov.hk/en/guideline1_year/29/134/518.html

4 How swine flu spreads

4.1 How do people become infected?

Human-to-human transmission of swine flu is occurring in the same way as seasonal flu is spread among people, mainly through droplets expelled during coughing or sneezing etc. People may also become infected by touching mucous membranes of mouth; nose; or eyes with hands contaminated with infective agents such as human swine influenza virus.

4.2 Is it safe to eat pork meat and pork products?

The human swine influenza virus is not known to be transmissible to people through eating processed pork or other food products derived from pigs. Cooking pork to an internal temperature of 70°C (160°F) kills the swine flu virus as other bacteria and viruses. For more information on human swine influenza and food safety, please refer to the following link provided by the Centre for Food Safety:

http://www.cfs.gov.hk/english/faq/faq_16.html

4.3 How long does the swine flu survive in the environment?

We know that some viruses and bacteria can live 2 hours or longer on surfaces like tables and desks. Frequent hand washing, environmental cleansing and disinfection can prevent spread of infection.