

FAQ

Human Swine Influenza (HSI)

Last updated: 11 December 2009

- **Prevention of human swine influenza**

5 Protecting oneself and others

- 5.1 Is there a human vaccine to protect from swine influenza?
- 5.2 What can I do to protect myself from getting sick?
- 5.3 Can I be protected against swine flu by having seasonal influenza vaccination?
- 5.4 What can I do during a pandemic?
- 5.5 Can I take oseltamivir (Tamiflu) or zanamivir (Relenza) as prophylaxis?
- 5.6 Is surgical mask effective against spread of influenza?
- 5.7 When do I need to wear a mask?
- 5.8 Is it safe to travel on mass public transport such as MTR and buses?
- 5.9 What should I do to maintain a high level of home and environmental hygiene?
- 5.10 Is there a chance of getting the infection through flushing of toilet after use?
- 5.11 If swine flu spreads rapidly in Hong Kong, what can people do?
- 5.12 I have contact dermatitis. How can I safely keep my hands clean?

6 Advice for travellers

- 6.1 Is it safe to travel?
- 6.2 How can I protect myself from HSI during the trip?
- 6.3 What should I do if I feel sick or develop flu-like symptoms before travel?

7 Advice for corporations and organisations

- 7.1 Why is it important to prevent human swine influenza (HSI) in the workplace?
- 7.2 How would HSI affect businesses?
- 7.3 How can employers reduce the risk of HSI in the workplace?
- 7.4 What can employees do to reduce risk of HSI in the workplace?
- 7.5 Should workers wear masks to prevent HSI?
- 7.6 What should employer do when an employee comes to work with influenza-like illness?
- 7.7 What is the risk to co-workers of an employee who is known to be a confirmed case of HSI?

- 7.8 What to do for co-workers of an employee who is known to be a confirmed case of HSI?
- 7.9 Should employers provide antiviral drugs for their employees?
- 7.10 Should companies restrict business travel to affected countries? Should employees who have travelled to affected countries be excluded from work?
- 7.11 Would the workplace be required to close to prevent spread of HSI?
- 7.12 How could corporations plan for business continuity in response to influenza pandemic?

FAQ

Human Swine Influenza

- **Prevention of human swine influenza**

5 Protecting oneself and others

5.1 Is there a human vaccine to protect from human swine influenza?

Vaccine against human swine influenza is available. Starting from late December 2009, the Government will provide human swine influenza vaccines for five target groups. All Hong Kong residents belonging to the target groups may get free vaccination at public clinics, or at private doctors enrolled in Human Swine Influenza Vaccination Subsidy Scheme at a subsidised rate.

The target groups for human swine influenza vaccination include:

- (a) healthcare workers
- (b) persons with chronic illnesses and pregnant women
- (c) children between the age of 6 months and less than 6 years
- (d) elderly persons aged 65 years or above
- (e) pig farmers and pig-slaughtering industry personnel

For details of the Government's Human Swine Influenza Vaccination Programme, please visit our webpage at

http://www.chp.gov.hk/view_content.asp?lang=en&info_id=19266

5.2 What can I do to protect myself from getting sick?

We recommend the following precautionary measures for ALL members of public:

- Keep hands clean and wash hands properly. Alcohol-based handrub is also effective when hands are not visibly soiled.
- Avoid touching mouth, nose or eyes.
- Wash hands with liquid soap promptly if they are dirtied by respiratory secretions, e.g. after sneezing or coughing.
- Cover nose and mouth when sneezing or coughing.

- Do not spit. Always wrap respiratory secretion with tissue paper, and dispose of the tissue paper properly in a lidded rubbish bin. Perform proper hand hygiene.
- Wear a mask when respiratory symptoms or fever develop. See a doctor right away.
- Do not go to work or school if you develop influenza-like symptoms.
- Those belonging to the target groups described in para 5.1 above should immediately get vaccinated.

5.3 Can I be protected against swine flu by having seasonal influenza vaccination?

The 2009/10 seasonal influenza vaccine does not contain human swine influenza component, therefore it will confer little or no protection against human swine influenza. However, the current seasonal influenza vaccine can help reduce the chance of complications and hospitalisation resulting from seasonal influenza. It can also reduce the chance of genetic re-assortment and subsequent emergence of influenza strain with pandemic potential. People should seek medical advice if they are considering getting the vaccination.

5.4 What can I do during a pandemic?

It may not be possible to totally eliminate the risk of infection during a pandemic. However, the community as a whole can reduce the risk considerably if every one maintains vigilance by adopting the following measures.

- Step up hygienic practices like washing hands frequently and keeping the environment clean and maintain good ventilation.
- Avoid crowded or poorly-ventilated places.
- Wear a mask if you develop flu-like symptoms, when caring for the sick, and when visiting hospitals and/or clinics.
- Watch out for the latest situation of the influenza pandemic and further announcements from the government.
- Pay attention to and comply with guidelines issued by the government with respect to prevention and control of the

pandemic influenza.

- Receive human swine influenza vaccine according to the recommendation of the Department of Health

5.5 Can I take oseltamivir (Tamiflu) or zanamivir (Relenza) as prophylaxis?

Prophylaxis should be prescribed by registered doctors only. This is because for prophylaxis, effectiveness lasts as long as the drugs are being taken and ceases once the drugs are stopped. Self-medication is not encouraged because of potential side effects and possibility of emergence of antiviral resistance.

5.6 Is surgical mask effective against spread of influenza?

Surgical masks, if properly worn, is one of the effective measures in preventing the spread of droplet infections including influenza. Please refer to our guideline entitled “using mask properly”

(http://www.chp.gov.hk/files/pdf/Use_Mask_Properly.pdf) for details.

However, this must be taken together with other preventive measures such as hand hygiene, healthy lifestyle, etc.

5.7 When do I need to wear a mask?

Carers of sick persons, those having respiratory symptoms and visitors to clinics and hospitals should put on a mask. Surgical masks should be used by individuals who enter crowded settings, both to protect oneself from exposure to respiratory droplets and to reduce the likelihood of coughing on others. However, time spent in crowded settings should be minimised as far as possible. For protection against infection, it is more important to avoid close contact with people who might be ill and staying in crowded settings than to rely on the use of masks.

5.8 Is it safe to travel on mass public transport such as MTR and buses?

Passengers using public transport are advised to take precautionary measures inside train/vehicle/ferry compartments to minimize the risk of contracting and spreading influenza. Please refer to the guideline “Health Advice for Passengers using Public Transport on the Prevention of

Influenza”

([http://www.chp.gov.hk/files/pdf/Health Advice for Passengers using Public Transport on the Prevention of Influenza Apr 09.pdf](http://www.chp.gov.hk/files/pdf/Health_Advice_for_Passengers_using_Public_Transport_on_the_Prevention_of_Influenza_Apr_09.pdf)) for details.

5.9 What should I do to maintain a high level of home and environmental hygiene?

The key actions to take to ensure adequate home and environmental hygiene are:

- ensure good ventilation
- use 1 in 99 diluted bleach to wipe domestic surfaces clean
- cleanse common areas e.g. lift lobbies and corridors with 1 in 99 diluted bleach
- maintain toilets, drains and pipes in proper function
- do not spit or litter in public places

For details, please refer to the document entitled “Advice on Household Disinfection at the Height of Influenza Season” in http://www.chp.gov.hk/files/pdf/Guideline%20on%20household%20disinfection_140308_en.pdf

5.10 Is there a chance of getting the infection through flushing of toilet after use?

At present, there is no scientific evidence to suggest that aerosol generated by toilet flushing can lead to spread of swine influenza. Nonetheless, we recommend the followings as a precautionary measure:

- Keep toilets and bathrooms clean and dry. Disinfect at least daily by using appropriate disinfectant, e.g. using 1 part of 5.25% household bleach in 99 parts of water for non-metallic surface, (or 70% alcohol for metallic surface), wait until dry,, then rinse with water and keep dry.
- Provide liquid soap and disposable paper towels for washing hands.
- Ensure the flushing system of the toilet is in proper function at all times.
- Cover the toilet bowl with lid before flushing
- Wash hands thoroughly after toileting

5.11 If swine flu spreads rapidly in Hong Kong, what can people do?

Swine flu virus is spread from person to person through coughing or sneezing of people with the disease. People may also be infected by touching objects carrying the virus and then touching their mouth, nose or eyes. Infected people is capable of infecting others beginning one day before symptoms develop and up to seven or more days after becoming sick, meaning that the disease could be passed on to others without the patient knowing it. Therefore, if swine flu begins to spread rapidly among the local community, people must adopt social distancing measures on top of personal and environmental hygiene, to reduce their chance of coming into close contact with the virus. Some effective means of social distancing include school closure, avoiding crowds, working from home, etc. Corporations should activate their business contingency plans. Members of the people should take heed of government announcements of social distancing measures and act accordingly. Putting on a mask will help if the risk of coming into contact with an infected person is high, e.g. caring for the sick, visiting a clinic, going to crowded places. Those belonging to the target groups should get vaccinated as recommended.

5.12 I have contact dermatitis. How can I safely keep my hands clean?

Hand hygiene is the most effective way of preventing transmission of communicable diseases. Hand rubbing with alcohol based hand rub is the ordinary practice when hands are not visibly soiled. Hand washing is required when hands are visibly soiled. As such, frequent hand hygiene is still advised for people with contact dermatitis.

The following tips will help:

- a) Use a lot of emollient or moisturizer (such as emulsifying ointment, aqueous cream and vaseline) immediately after hand washing.
- b) Try alcohol based hand rub if hands are not obviously soiled. Preparations containing glycerine are shown to cause less irritation than washing with soap. Note, however, that use of alcohol based hand rub with skin breakage may cause burning sensation.
- c) Do not wash hands with soap and water immediately before or after using an alcohol based hand rub. This is unnecessary and may worsen the skin

condition.

d) Change to another hand hygiene product if you find sensitivity or reactions after using the current one.

e) See a doctor if the skin condition worsens.

Please also note that wearing gloves cannot replace good hand hygiene. If gloves have to be worn, ensure hands are dry before putting them on. In addition, perform proper hand hygiene immediately after taking off the gloves.

6 Advice for travellers

6.1 Is it safe to travel?

The pandemic influenza virus has already spread around the world. According to the World Health Organization, travel restrictions related to pandemic (H1N1) 2009 are not recommended. There is no scientific reason to restrict or delay international travel to reduce spread of the infection. However, if you are ill, it is prudent to delay travel.

After returning from the trip, pay close attention to your health. If influenza-like symptoms appear, put on a face mask and seek medical consultation.

6.2 How can I protect myself from HSI during the trip?

Maintain good personal hygiene, wash hands or use alcohol-based handrub frequently and avoid contact with sick people during travel.

For details of precautionary measures, please refer to para 5.2 “What can I do to protect myself from getting sick?”

For enquires, you can contact the Department of Health hotline on 2125 1111.

6.3 What should I do if I feel sick or develop flu-like symptoms before travel?

You should seek medical help as soon as symptoms arise. Do not travel until your doctor has confirmed your fitness. Get medical insurance before you travel.

(More travel health information is available at the following URL:

http://www.chp.gov.hk/view_content.asp?lang=en&info_id=16723)

7 Advice for corporations and organisations

7.1 Why is it important to prevent human swine influenza (HSI) in the workplace?

As the working population spends a significant portion of time at work, they may contract HSI in the workplace. Employers have to take measures to protect the health of their employees and to minimise the negative impact of HSI in workplace operations and economic activities of the community.

7.2 How would HSI affect businesses?

Many employees may be unable to go to work because they may get infected and become sick, or they may have to stay at home to care for sick family members or children affected by school suspension.

7.3 How can employers reduce the risk of HSI in the workplace?

They should advise employees not go to work if influenza-like illness (ILI) developed. They should provide guidelines and display posters related to HSI prevention and encourage employees to pay attention to good personal and environmental hygiene practices.

They should provide sufficient hand washing facilities along with soap and paper towels/hand-dryers and ensure that the facilities are in good working condition. If soap and water is not readily available, hand sanitizer containing 70%-80% alcohol is a good substitute.

Frequently-touched surfaces such as doorknobs, door handles, common keyboards, handrails and telephones should be cleaned regularly. Also, contaminated areas should be cleaned and disinfected properly. Maintain good ventilation indoors and avoid overcrowding. Pay attention to up-to-date information and advice from the government on HSI prevention and control.

7.4 What can employees do to reduce the risk of contracting HSI in the workplace?

Employees should stay home if they develop ILI until they are symptom-free for 48 hours or assessed fit by a doctor. Employees should cooperate with their employers and comply with preventive guidelines and measures for HSI. Employees should also adopt good personal and environmental hygiene practice, maintain cough and sneeze etiquette, clean and disinfect contaminated surfaces properly. They should dispose of used tissue paper/disposable towel properly; wash hands frequently (especially after coughing/sneezing and cleaning/disinfecting contaminated areas) and avoid touching eyes, nose, or mouth.

7.5 Should workers wear masks to prevent HSI?

Since HSI is now widely circulating, the risk of infection in most workplaces is not significantly different from that in the community. As such, there is no particular need to wear face masks at work in general. Use of masks may create a false sense of protection and risk omission of other important preventive measure. Improper use may actually increase the risk of infection. Emphasis should be put on personal and environmental hygiene instead.

Face masks is most useful if worn by infected or symptomatic persons to prevent droplet spread of disease to others via coughing and sneezing.

7.6 What should employer do when an employee comes to work with influenza-like illness?

The employer should give a facemask to the sick employee to wear (if available and tolerable) and ask him/her to stop working and consult a doctor as soon as possible. If the employee presents with severe symptoms, place him / her in a separate, well ventilated room if possible and call for ambulance. Persons assisting the sick employee should wear face masks to protect themselves and clean their hands thoroughly afterwards.

Ensure that the ill employee should refrain from work until at least 48 hours after symptoms have resolved or the doctor has confirmed fitness for

resumption of work

- 7.7 What is the risk to co-workers of an employee who is known to be a confirmed case of HSI?

Transmission of HSI is similar to that of seasonal flu in general. The risk of contracting the virus is higher if the infected employee has sneezed or coughed on a co-worker, or the co-worker has touched a surface that has flu virus on it and then touched his/her eyes, mouth or nose.

Good hygiene practices such as frequent hand washing and avoidance of touching eyes, mouth or nose may reduce the risk of infection.

- 7.8 What to do for co-workers of an employee who is known to be a confirmed case of HSI?

Co-workers can continue to work as usual but should monitor their health for 7 days after last contact with the infected employee. If they develop ILI, they should notify their supervisor, refrain from work, wear a mask and seek medical attention as soon as possible. They should follow doctor's advice and stay at home or in hospital for treatment until at least 48 hours after symptoms have resolved or the doctor has confirmed fitness for resumption of work.

- 7.9 Should employers provide antiviral drugs for their employees?

Some employers may have made arrangement with doctors to stockpile antiviral drugs as a preparation for influenza pandemic. As far as human swine influenza is concerned, however, most infected people have a clinically mild course and recover completely without the need of antivirals. Moreover, antivirals should only be prescribed by doctors as and when considered necessary and appropriate.

- 7.10 Should companies restrict business travel to affected countries? Should employees who have travelled to affected countries be excluded from work?

It is not necessary to restrict business travel. However, persons planning for business travel should watch out for the latest situation of human swine

influenza in the destination, pay attention to announcements from the local government and the public health measures which may have bearings on the trip. Get medical insurance before setting off and take adequate face masks and alcohol-based hand-rub. Maintain good personal hygiene during the trip, and avoid going to crowded places and having contact with ill persons.

On the other hand, persons with ILI should cancel or delay the business trip and consult a doctor as soon as possible. If ILI develop during the trip, do not get on board an airplane to avoid spreading the infection. Put on a mask and seek medical attention where you are. Return to Hong Kong at least 48 hours after symptoms have resolved or the doctor has confirmed fitness for travel.

As there has been community transmission of HSI in Hong Kong already, travellers returning to Hong Kong do not need to be excluded from work if they do not have ILI.

7.11 Would the workplace be required to close to prevent spread of HSI?

Thus far there has been no need for employers to close down their workplaces totally to prevent the spread of HSI. Nevertheless, the workplace may need to be closed temporarily or partially for cleaning and disinfection if considered necessary, e.g. if a serious case of HSI is confirmed in the workplace.

7.12 How could corporations plan for business continuity in response to influenza pandemic?

We have the following advice:

- Develop an overall health policy to provide strategic directions for ensuring safety and health of employees in public health emergencies such as influenza pandemic
- Promote awareness and understanding of employees on human swine influenza
- Develop plans and guidelines on prevention of human swine influenza at workplace

- Familiarise with the Government's preparedness plan for influenza pandemic and plan with reference to the three-tier response system of the Government's preparedness plan
- Ensure proper implementation of preventive and control measures
- Adjust strategies in accordance with the latest development and recommendations by the Government.
- Maintain core operations:
 - Develop plans for staff deployment / roster for core services according to different response levels.
 - Identify skeleton staff for essential services and ensure adequate preventive measures in place. Assign and train reserve staff as surge capacity to back up the work when necessary.
 - Consider pairing up staff with affiliate or partnership companies to maintain backup manpower.
 - Consider decreasing direct human interaction by rearranging the schedule of work, minimizing the number of meetings, split working groups into smaller teams and working at different sites and establishing electronic communication and transaction system which enables video-conferencing and helps reduce face-to-face meetings, provides online customer services and allows employees working from home when necessary.
- Ensure feasibility and effectiveness of continuity plans by conducting drills or exercises