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27 April 2009

Dear Principal / Person-in-charge,

Be vigilant against Swine Influenza

In view of the recent outbreak of human swine influenza A (H1N1) in the North America, the Serious Response Level under the Government's Preparedness Plan for Pandemic was activated on 26 April 2009. I would like to take this opportunity to remind kindergartens and schools to take precautions against swine influenza.

The symptoms and mode of transmission of swine influenza in people are expected to be similar to regular human seasonal influenza and include fever, lethargy, lack of appetite and coughing. I attach a fact sheet on swine influenza for your reference.

Kindergartens and schools are collective assembly places and young children are incapable of taking proper personal care. To prevent possible outbreak of influenza, children with fever and respiratory symptoms are strongly advised not to attend school till 48 hours after fever has subsided. Besides, parents should record the body temperature of their children and hand in the temperature record sheet to the school everyday.

Any student or staff returning from an affected place should wear a surgical mask for seven days as a precautionary measure. If they develop influenza-like symptoms such as fever, sore throat and cough, they should consult a doctor for medical advice promptly. The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) may consider advising closure of an individual school if any student/staff of a school is confirmed to be suffering from swine influenza.



In addition, the following general precautionary measures are also advised:

- Keep hands clean and wash hands properly. Alcohol-based hand rub is also effective when hands are not visibly soiled.
- Avoid touching eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread that way.
- Wash hands with liquid soap promptly if they are contaminated by respiratory tract secretions, e.g. after sneezing or coughing.
- Cover nose and mouth when sneezing or coughing.
- No spitting. Always wrap nasal and mouth discharges with tissue paper, and dispose of the tissue paper properly in a lidded rubbish bin.
- Wear mask when symptoms of respiratory tract infection or fever develop. Seek medical advice promptly.
- Refrain from work or school if you develop symptoms of influenza

If you notice an increase in respiratory illnesses or absenteeism among your staff or clients, please report to our Central Notification Office (Tel: 2477-2772; Fax: 2477-2770) for immediate epidemiological investigations and outbreak control.

For the latest information on human swine influenza, please see our Daily Update on Human Swine Influenza at the CHP website (<http://www.chp.gov.hk/>).

Yours sincerely,



(Dr SK CHUANG)

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Health Topic: Human Infection with Swine Influenza

Swine influenza is a respiratory disease of pigs caused by type A influenza that regularly causes outbreaks of influenza among pigs. There are four main influenza type A virus subtypes that have been isolated in pigs: H1N1, H1N2, H3N2, and H3N1. However, most of the recently isolated influenza viruses from pigs have been H1N1 viruses. The classical swine flu virus (an influenza type A H1N1 virus) was first isolated from a pig in 1930 and it is known to circulate among pig populations since then. The H1N1 swine flu viruses are antigenically different from human H1N1 viruses and swine flu viruses do not normally infect humans. However, sporadic human infections with swine flu do occasionally occur. Most commonly, human cases of swine influenza happen in people with direct exposure to pigs (e.g. workers in the swine industry). Human-to-human transmission of swine flu can also occur.

Clinical features

The symptoms of swine flu in people are expected to be similar to the symptoms of regular human seasonal influenza and include fever, lethargy, lack of appetite and coughing. Some people with swine flu also have reported runny nose, sore throat, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea.

Mode of transmission

Influenza viruses can be directly transmitted from pigs to people and from people to pigs. Human infection with flu viruses from pigs are most likely to occur when people are in close proximity to infected pigs, such as in pig barns and livestock exhibits housing pigs at fairs. Human-to-human transmission of swine flu can also occur. This is thought to occur in the same way as seasonal flu occurs in people, which is mainly person-to-person transmission through coughing or sneezing of people infected with the influenza virus. People may become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose. Swine influenza viruses are not transmitted by food. Eating properly handled and cooked pork and pork products is safe. Cooking pork to an internal temperature of 160°F (71.1°C) kills the swine flu virus as it does other bacteria and viruses.

Prevention

Since H1N1 swine flu viruses are antigenically very different from human H1N1 viruses, vaccines for human seasonal flu would not provide protection from H1N1 swine flu viruses. We are recommending precautionary measures for members of public:

- Keep hands clean and wash hands properly. Alcohol-based handrub is also effective when hands are not visibly soiled.
- Avoid touching eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread that way
- Wash hands with liquid soap promptly if they are contaminated by respiratory tract secretions, e.g. after sneezing or coughing.
- Cover nose and mouth when sneezing or coughing.
- No spitting. Always wrap nasal and mouth discharges with tissue paper, and dispose of the tissue paper properly in a lidded rubbish bin.
- Wear mask when symptoms of respiratory tract infection or fever develop. Seek medical advice promptly.
- Refrain from work or school if develop symptoms of influenza