

Communications Team

401 Fifth Avenue South, Suite 1300
Seattle, WA 98104-1818

206-296-4600 Fax 206-296-0166
TTY Relay: 711

www.kingcounty.gov/health

Frequently Asked Questions—Swine Flu

What is swine flu?

“Swine flu” is an Influenza A virus normally found in pigs. There are many such viruses and they rarely infect humans. The virus currently causing human illness is a new type of swine flu that has developed the ability to infect people and be transmitted from person to person.

Although this new virus is called “swine flu,” it is not transmitted from pigs to humans, or from eating pork products. Like other respiratory diseases, it is spread from person to person through coughs and sneezes. When people cough or sneeze, they spread germs through the air or onto surfaces that other people may touch.

What is Public Health– Seattle & King County doing now?

Public Health is actively working with hospitals and health care providers to promptly identify potential cases of swine flu and to assure that if cases are identified that appropriate treatment and measures to prevent transmission to others are used.

Should swine flu be detected in King County, it does not necessarily indicate that severe illnesses will result. However, since it is not possible to predict at this time if the swine flu outbreak will worsen or remain mild, Public Health is working to be sure that our community is prepared in case the situation becomes more serious.

What are the symptoms of swine flu?

The symptoms of swine flu in people are similar to the symptoms of seasonal flu and include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people with swine flu also reported diarrhea and vomiting. In the past, severe illness (pneumonia and respiratory failure) and deaths have been reported with swine flu infection in people. Similar to seasonal flu, swine flu may make chronic medical conditions worse

When should I seek medical care?

If you have **not** traveled to an area where swine flu is occurring in the 7 days before becoming ill and you have **not** had close contact with an ill person who recently returned from an area where swine flu is occurring, **you do not need to seek medical care for swine flu evaluation.**

Consult with a health care provider promptly or seek medical care for the following flu-like symptoms:

- Fever for three days or more with no explanation
- Rapidly worsening illness
- Person is unresponsive and unable to get out of bed
- Bad sore throat
- Difficulty breathing

- Severe cough
- Chest pain

If the following flu-like symptoms are mild, **medical attention is not typically required.**

- Runny nose or nasal stuffiness
- Low-grade fever for less than 3 days
- Mild headache
- Body aches
- Mild stomach upset

Does Public Health have guidelines about who should seek medical care?

At this time, Public Health - Seattle & King County recommends people make decisions about when to seek medical care as they would under normal circumstances.

- If you have **not** traveled to an area where swine flu is occurring in the 7 days before becoming ill and you have **not** had close contact with an ill person who recently returned from an area where swine flu is occurring, **you do not need to seek medical care for swine flu evaluation.**
- If you are feeling ill with flu-like symptoms, seek medical care as you would under ordinary circumstances. If you have traveled recently, mention this to your health care provider.
- If you recently returned from an area where there are confirmed swine flu cases and feel ill with flu-like symptoms, contact your health care provider for advice. Public Health does not recommend people with mild symptoms seek medical care just because they have traveled to areas where swine flu has been reported. If your health care provider thinks your symptoms require medical evaluation, swine flu testing might be appropriate.
- If you feel ill with flu-like symptoms have had close contact with an ill person who recently returned from an area where swine flu is occurring, contact your health care provider for advice. Public Health does not recommend people with mild symptoms seek medical care just because they have had contact with an ill person from an area where swine flu has been reported. If your health care provider thinks your symptoms require medical evaluation, swine flu testing might be appropriate.

If you get sick with influenza

- If you get sick, Public Health - Seattle & King County strongly recommends that you stay home from work or school so you can get better and keep others from getting sick.
- Also, if you get sick remain at home and avoid contact with others until seven days after your first symptoms began or until symptoms resolve, whichever is longer.

Everyday behaviors to stay healthy

- 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. If you don't have access to soap and water, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- To further prevent the spread of germs, avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.
- Avoid close contact with sick people
- Try to stay in good general health. Get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids, and eat nutritious food.

What can I do now to get prepared at home or work for a more serious influenza pandemic?

This is an excellent time to get prepared at home and work for a more serious influenza pandemic.

- Store water, food and other essentials. In a pandemic, you should avoid contact with other people as much as possible, including trips to the store. Prepare to get by on for at least two weeks on what you have at home
- Store medical and health supplies such as cough syrup, soap, and pain relief medicines.
- At work, know employer policies about sick leave, and ask your employer what your business will do if there is a pandemic.
- At home, decide who will take care of children if schools are closed.

For more detailed information go to: www.kingcounty.gov/health/pandemicflu

Is this swine flu virus contagious?

The CDC has determined that this swine influenza A (H1N1) virus is contagious and is spreading from human to human. At this time, however, it is not known how easily the virus spreads between people.

How does swine flu spread?

This swine influenza A (H1N1) virus appears to be spreading in the same way that seasonal flu spreads. Flu viruses are mostly spread from one person to another by coughing or sneezing of an infected person. Sometimes people get infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose.

How does someone with the flu infect someone else?

Influenza spreads person-to-person mainly through coughing or sneezing of infected people. Infected people may infect others beginning at least one day before symptoms develop and up to seven or more days after becoming sick. You can pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick.

What should I do to keep from getting the flu?

First and most important: wash your hands. Try to stay in good general health. Get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids, and eat nutritious food. Try not touch surfaces that may be contaminated with the flu virus. Avoid close contact with people who are sick.

Are there medicines to treat swine flu?

Yes, and the CDC recommends the use of oseltamivir or zanamivir (brand names Tamiflu and Relenza) for the treatment and/or prevention of infection with swine influenza viruses. Antiviral drugs are prescription medicines (pills, liquid or an inhaler) that fight against the flu by keeping flu viruses from reproducing in your body. If you get sick, antiviral drugs can make your illness milder and make you feel better faster. They may also prevent serious flu complications. For treatment, antiviral drugs work best if started soon after getting sick (within two days of symptoms).

Is there a human vaccine to protect from swine influenza?

There are no vaccines that protect against the current swine influenza virus causing illness in humans. It is not known whether current human seasonal influenza vaccines can provide any protection.

How long can an infected person spread swine flu to others?

People with swine flu should be considered potentially contagious as long as they are symptomatic and possibly for up to seven days after the start of getting sick. Children, especially younger children, might potentially be contagious for longer periods.

What about travel to and from Mexico or other states where swine flu had been confirmed?

At this time, CDC recommends that U.S. travelers avoid all nonessential travel to Mexico. Changes to this recommendation will be posted at www.cdc.gov/travel/. Please check this site frequently for updates.

Is it safe to eat pork and pork products?

Yes. Swine influenza has not been shown to be transmissible to people through eating properly handled and prepared pork (pig meat) or other products derived from pigs. The swine influenza virus is killed by cooking temperatures of 160_F/70_C, corresponding to the general guidance for the preparation of pork and other meat.

For more information and on-going updates:

Public Health – Seattle & King County, www.kingcounty.gov/health/swineflu
Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC), www.cdc.gov/swineflu
Washington State Department of Health, www.doh.wa.gov/swineflu