

## **Swine flu the pandemic disease – preventive measures to take**

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Swine flu has made its mark in Hyderabad. It is spreading in its favorable winter season throughout the Telugu speaking states of India from the common capital. So it's time to know more about this disease and protect our self from this infection. A brief description of swine flu, its spread and preventive measures has been explained in this article for the benefit of nursing staff, lab technicians and other health care professionals.

Swine flu, also known as H1N1 virus. It was first identified in 2009, and declared as a pandemic disease. Swine flu is contagious disease, spreading from human to human, affecting people throughout the world or on multiple continents at the same time. H1N1 has already been seen in 74 countries across the globe. Presently it is not known how easily the virus spreads between people.

Swine flu is unusual because it does not target the same age group as typical flu. The disease focuses on young adults. This is unusual because most flu viruses attack those who are elderly or very young. Some form of immunity to swine flu may exist in the elderly due to previous flu exposures.

Flu viruses are spread mainly from person to person through droplets created while coughing or sneezing by a person infected with the influenza-A (H1N1).

Risk factors for swine flu include:

- compromised immune system (from a disease such as AIDS)
- pregnancy
- past history of infections

The symptoms of swine flu are usually like those of regular seasonal flu and include:

- Headache
- Chills
- Cough
- Fever
- Loss of appetite

- Aches
- Fatigue
- Runny nose
- Sneezing
- Watery eyes
- Throat irritation
- Nausea and vomiting
- Diarrhea

### **Diagnosis of Swine flu**

A diagnosis is made by sampling fluid from those with swine flu. To take a sample, lab technician may take a swab of the nose or throat. The swab will be analyzed using different laboratory techniques to identify the specific type of virus.

### **People who are at high risk for developing swine flu**

- Children younger than 5, but especially children younger than 2 years old
- Adults 65 years of age and older
- Pregnant women (and women up to two weeks post partum)
- Residents of nursing homes and other long-term care facilities

People who have medical conditions like:

- Asthma
- Neurological and neurodevelopmental conditions [including disorders of the brain, spinal cord, peripheral nerve, and muscle such as cerebral palsy, epilepsy (seizure disorders), stroke, intellectual disability (mental retardation), moderate to severe developmental delay, muscular dystrophy, or spinal cord injury].
- Chronic lung disease (such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease [COPD] and cystic fibrosis)
- Heart disease (such as congenital heart disease, congestive heart failure and coronary artery disease)

- Blood disorders (such as sickle cell disease)
- Endocrine disorders (such as diabetes mellitus)
- Kidney disorders
- Liver disorders
- Metabolic disorders (such as inherited metabolic disorders and mitochondrial disorders)
- Weakened immune system due to disease or medication (such as people with HIV or AIDS, or cancer, or those on chronic steroids)
- People younger than 19 years of age who are receiving long-term aspirin therapy
- People who are morbidly obese (Body Mass Index, or BMI, of 40 or greater)

### Precautions to take against Swine Flu

As of 2009, the CDC has recommended healthcare workers in contact with swine flu or suspected swine flu patients should take precautions. Precautions against infection include:

- Wearing gloves and/or gowns
- Using eye protection
- Wearing face masks

In known cases of swine flu, patients should be isolated to prevent the spread of H1N1.

General preventive measures to take against swine flu:

- Get a regular seasonal flu vaccination. It might not help against this specific strain, but it won't hurt.
- Wash your hands frequently with soap and hot running water. If hot water is not available, use an alcohol-based hand gel.
- When you cough and sneeze, cover your mouth and nose. Wash your hands afterwards.
- Avoid being near others who might be sick.
- Stay home if you are sick, to avoid affecting others.

During the swine flu pandemic, scientists were able to produce a vaccine. The vaccine may be given through an injection or nasal spray.

### Treatment of Swine flu

There are some drugs around that can effectively treat swine flu infection in humans. Two main types of antiviral drugs, oseltamivir or zanamivir, are used for the treatment and prevention of infection with these swine influenza viruses.

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 2 days of symptoms). Most previous swine influenza human cases recovered completely without the need for medical attention.

### Preventing Swine Flu

The best method to protect ourselves from swine flu is prevention. Easy ways to prevent swine flu (in addition to being vaccinated) include:

- Washing hands frequently with soap or hand sanitizer
- Not touching your nose, mouth, or eyes because the virus can survive on telephones, tabletops, etc.
- Staying home from work or school if you are ill to keep others healthy
- Avoiding large gatherings when swine flu is in season. Flu season shifts a little bit from year to year, but in the United States it generally peaks in January, although it often starts in October and runs until as late as May. It is possible to get the flu year-round.

### References

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