



SWINE FLU VIRUS: FAQs

What is swine flu?

Swine influenza, or “swine flu”, is a highly contagious acute respiratory disease caused by a new strain of the H1N1 virus. As the name suggests, the virus shows some similarities with a flu seen in pigs, although this new strain is transmitted human-to-human. Swine flu cannot be caught by eating pork meat [as advised by IFH]

How does swine flu spread?

The virus spreads in much the same way as seasonal flu, via the mouth, nose or eyes by aerosols (from sneezes) and direct and indirect contact. Transmission occurs in three main ways:

- In **aerosols**, as very fine particles sneezed out by an infected person that are small enough to stay in the air long enough to be breathed in by another person.
- In larger **droplets** from coughs or sneezes that fall directly onto another person’s face or into the air they are breathing.
- By **indirect contact** via hands and surfaces. Virus particles deposited from sneezes, hands or items touched by an infected person can be picked up on the hands of another person, and infect them when they touch their face, mouth or nose with dirty hands.

What are the symptoms of swine flu?

Swine flu symptoms are very similar to seasonal influenza and generally include fever, fatigue, lack of appetite and coughing although some people also develop a runny nose, sore throat, vomiting or diarrhoea.

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.



Is there a human vaccine to protect against swine influenza?

Influenza viruses change very quickly. The World Health Organisation (WHO) selects vaccine viruses twice a year for seasonal influenza protection, one for the Northern hemisphere winter and another for the Southern hemisphere. The current seasonal influenza vaccine, based on the WHO recommendation, does not contain the swine influenza virus. It is possible that the flu vaccines currently available may give some, if limited protection against swine flu. US scientists are already developing a bespoke new vaccine, but it may take up to six months before the vaccine becomes freely available [as advised by IFH].

What drugs are available for treatment?

Two drugs commonly used to treat flu, Tamiflu and Relenza, seem to be effective at treating cases that have occurred so far. However, the drugs must be administered at an early stage to be effective. Use of these drugs may also make it less likely that infected people will pass the virus on to others.

What can I do to protect myself and my family from Swine influenza virus?

Influenza is thought to spread mainly through coughing and sneezing from infected people so try to avoid anyone who is sick. The WHO recommends washing your hands regularly with soap and water to protect against both direct (for example, shaking hands with an infected person who has touched his mouth or nose) and indirect contact (for example, touching a doorknob handled by an infected person) with the flu virus.

Can anti-bacterial soap like Lifebuoy kill swine flu?

Organisations like the WHO recommend handwashing with soap to help prevent the transmission of swine flu because it is an action that interrupts person-to-person transmission via surfaces and is proven to reduce the incidence of "acute respiratory infection"¹.

¹ Hand washing with soap – a new way to prevent ARIs? Sandy Cairncross, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine



What is the correct way to wash hands with soap?

Wet your hands with running water and apply soap evenly over your hands, and then rub hands together, make sure you rub between fingers and on the top of your hands for around 20 seconds and then rinse with clean water. Lastly, make sure you dry your hands without re-contaminating them, ideally on a dry paper towel.

Why isn't it enough to wash with water alone?

Washing hands with water alone, a more common practice, is significantly less effective than washing hands with soap. Using soap adds to the time spent washing and breaks down the grease and dirt that carry most germs by facilitating the rubbing and friction that dislodge them.

Is alcohol hand rub always enough?

No. Handwashing with soap and water should always be the first option. However alcohol hand rub is excellent for disinfecting visually clean hands. Also, compared to handwashing with soap, alcohol is less effective against some viruses that could make you ill.

Is there any definitive research to show the impact of handwashing on influenza?

No there isn't, but there is positive evidence that it works against other acute respiratory viral infections. Recommendations from international health authorities are based on the view that transmission by droplets and by contact is important, such that simple hygiene steps can help reduce transmission. This reflects evidence of such measures helping prevent infection in other similar outbreaks.