



## What you need to know about...

# Swine Flu 2009: The Basics

### **What is swine flu?**

Swine flu is a respiratory virus that commonly causes outbreaks of influenza in pigs. People do not normally get swine flu, but human infections can occur. Swine flu viruses have been reported to spread from person-to-person, but in the past this transmission was limited. In late April 2009, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) determined that the swine flu virus (H1N1) is contagious and is spreading from human to human.

### **What are the signs and symptoms of swine flu in people?**

The symptoms of swine flu in people are the same as the regular seasonal flu: (1) fever, (2) cough, (3) sore throat, (4) body aches, (5) headache, (6) chills and (7) fatigue. Some people have reported diarrhea and vomiting associated with swine flu. In some cases, severe illness and deaths have been reported. Like seasonal flu, swine flu may cause a worsening of underlying chronic medical conditions. People with chronic respiratory illnesses such as asthma and COPD should pay particular attention to the symptoms of swine flu.

### **How does swine flu spread?**

Swine flu spreads in the same way that seasonal flu spreads. Flu viruses are spread mainly from person to person through coughing or sneezing of people with influenza. Sometimes people may become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose.

### **How long can viruses live outside the body?**

Some viruses can live 2 hours or longer on surfaces like cafeteria tables, doorknobs, and desks. Frequent handwashing will help you reduce the chance of getting contaminated from these common surfaces.

### **What can I do to protect myself from getting sick?**

No vaccine is currently available to protect against swine flu. There are everyday steps, however, that can help prevent the spread of germs that cause respiratory illnesses like influenza:

- 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. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers are also effective.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- If you get sick with influenza, CDC recommends that you stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.
- There is no need for the general public to wear masks. In some cases, masks may be recommended for health care workers and people (including family members) who come in close contact with swine flu patients.
- If you experience symptoms of swine influenza, contact your healthcare provider to discuss possible treatments.

**For more information** visit the Respiratory Health Association of Metropolitan Chicago's website at [www.lungchicago.org](http://www.lungchicago.org).