

PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENT RE: SWINE FLU May 3, 2009

Dear Chimnissing:

There is much in the media reporting regarding the 'Swine Flu' that has been causing some concern amongst people – understandably so.

I want to give you some **factual information** that has come from Health Canada and the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC), current as of May 3rd, 2009 that I hope will help to alleviate many of your fears and feelings of vulnerability. Hope this helps...

Firstly – to put things in perspective – According to Dr. Lillian Yuan (Health Canada's Regional Community Medicine Specialist) **every year there are approximately 4,000 deaths that are attributed to the SEASONAL flu. The numbers that have been reported regarding the Swine Flu are very small by comparison thus far.**

That is not to say that we should not all be continuing to practice '**universal precautions**' to protect ourselves and others – like...

- washing your hands frequently with either soap and water or with hand sanitizer;
- coughing into a tissue or the crook of your elbow rather than your bare hand;
- avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth (this is often how we become ill)
- staying away from public places when you are sick (have a new or worse cough or are short of breath and are running a fever of greater than 38°C);
- cleansing the surfaces of your living area daily when you or someone in your home is ill;
- avoiding close contact (closer than 6 feet) with people who appear to be unwell;
- and eating healthy foods, being well rested, and exercising regularly.

Here is some information about the current situation:

Canada: As of May 3rd, 2009 there had been 101 cases of swine influenza reported in Canada – 16 confirmed in Ontario. **All Canadian cases thus far have been considered 'mild' and have been recovering at home.**

Globally – As of May 4th, 2009 there have been 20 countries affected with 985 confirmed cases in total (this includes Canada's numbers) and other than Mexico, the cases have been considered mild. **There have been no deaths associated with Swine Flu outside of Mexico.**

It also appears that this virus is acting in a similar way to Seasonal Influenza and is losing strength and momentum with the arrival of warmer weather.

Symptoms of Swine Flu (similar to Seasonal Flu):

Symptoms include fever, fatigue (weak & tired), and lack of appetite, coughing, and sore throat. Some people with human swine influenza have also reported vomiting and diarrhea.

Here are some answers to frequently asked questions regarding the Swine Flu from:

- **the World Health Organization** (<http://www.who.int/en/>)
- **the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC)**
(http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/alert-alerte/swine-porcine/faq_rg_swine-eng.php#faq4)

(I have just included the highlights here, to read the full lists, visit the website address)

(*slanted* words below were added by me or changed for clarity)

What is swine influenza?

Swine influenza, or “swine flu”, is a highly contagious acute respiratory disease of pigs, caused by one of several swine influenza A viruses. Morbidity (*number of those who get the illness*) tends to be high and mortality (*number of those who die from the illness*) low (1-4%). The virus is spread among pigs by aerosols (*air-borne droplets*), direct and indirect contact, and asymptomatic (*without symptoms*) carrier pigs. Outbreaks in pigs occur year round, with an increased incidence in the fall and winter in temperate zones. Many countries routinely vaccinate swine populations against swine influenza.

Sometimes pigs can be infected with more than one virus type at a time, which can allow the genes from these viruses to mix. This can result in an influenza virus containing genes from a number of sources, called a "reassortant" virus. Although swine influenza viruses are normally species specific (*i.e. pigs infect pigs; humans infect humans*) and only infect pigs, they do sometimes cross the species barrier to cause disease in humans.

What are the implications for human health?

Outbreaks and sporadic (*here and there*) human infection with swine influenza have been occasionally reported. Generally clinical symptoms are similar to seasonal influenza but *the symptoms reported can be anywhere* from asymptomatic infection (*no symptoms*) to severe pneumonia resulting in death.

Since typical clinical presentation of swine influenza infection in humans **resembles seasonal influenza and other acute upper respiratory tract infections**, most of the cases have been detected by chance through seasonal influenza surveillance. Mild or asymptomatic cases may have escaped from recognition; therefore the true extent of this disease among humans is unknown.

Why are people concerned about this particular strain?

This strain of human swine influenza (H1N1) is a new, or novel, influenza virus.

Since this is a new strain, people will likely have no natural immunity to protect against the virus. International experts are concerned that this strain could (*'could' – not necessarily 'will'*) spread quickly. Investigation is underway to learn more about the way the virus spreads. Governments around the world and the World Health Organization are engaged to investigate and address this situation.

Are all cases of human swine influenza severe?

No. To date, the cases of human swine influenza reported in Canada are milder than those reported in Mexico. The cases reported in Mexico have been more severe, involving mostly healthy young people who rapidly progressed from mild illness to severe respiratory distress, within an average of five days. (*Mexico is also experiencing a late seasonal flu season and some cases of seasonal flu may be inaccurately being reported as swine flu*)

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 *that come* from pigs. The swine influenza virus is killed by cooking temperatures of 160°F/70°C - *this is in keeping with* the general guidance for the preparation of pork and other meat.

Now that human swine influenza cases have been detected in Canada, what additional steps will the Government of Canada take to contain the virus?

Our primary goal is to slow the spread of the disease.

A number of steps are involved in doing this:

- Surveillance is being increased and frontline health care workers are actively looking for and reporting positive cases.
- Health care workers have been provided with detailed advice on how to manage suspect and/or confirmed cases.
- If they are needed, antiviral medications from Canada's stockpile will be used both to treat active illness and to prevent onset of illness in people close to the affected patient – this is called "prophylaxis".

Should Canadians take any extra measures like wearing surgical masks to avoid catching human swine influenza?

Canadians should continue to take **normal precautions to protect themselves as they would from a regular flu**. While we are investigating to learn more about how this virus spreads, our best advice is for Canadians to wash their hands frequently, cover coughs and sneezes, and stay home when ill.

The Public Health Agency of Canada does not recommend that members of the general public wear surgical masks to protect against contracting human swine influenza (*only those experiencing symptoms and needing to be in public places need wear a surgical mask*). Evidence shows that this is not effective in preventing transmission of influenza in the general public. People often use masks incorrectly, or contaminate them when putting them on and taking them off, which could actually increase the risk of infection.

What about the pandemic risk?

It is likely that most of people, especially those who do not have regular contact with pigs, do not have immunity to swine influenza viruses that can prevent the virus infection. If a swine virus establishes efficient human-to human transmission, it can cause an influenza pandemic. The impact of a pandemic caused by such a virus is difficult to predict: it depends on *how strong and how easily transmitted* the virus, existing immunity among people, cross protection by antibodies acquired from seasonal influenza infection and host factors.

Is this the next influenza pandemic?

It is too soon to know. Pandemic influenza is defined as a new influenza virus that spreads easily between humans and affects a wide geographic area. In this case, more investigation and information is needed to determine how easily the virus spreads. This investigation is ongoing.

Are all pandemics severe?

No. An influenza pandemic may be mild or severe. An influenza pandemic means the virus is spread easily between humans, and affects a wide geographic area. **A pandemic influenza does not necessarily cause more severe illness.**

Is there a human vaccine to protect from swine influenza?

There are no vaccines that contain the current swine influenza virus causing illness in humans. It is not known whether current human seasonal influenza vaccines can provide any protection. Influenza viruses change very quickly. It is important to develop a vaccine against the currently circulating virus strain for it to provide maximum protection to the vaccinated people. This is why WHO needs access to as many viruses as possible in order to select the most appropriate candidate vaccine virus.

What drugs are available for treatment?

There are two *main drugs* that the recent human cases with swine influenza in the United States *have shown themselves to be* sensitive to - oseltamivir and zanamivir. Some influenza viruses develop resistance to the antiviral medicines, limiting the effectiveness of treatment.

But...Most of the previously reported swine influenza cases recovered fully from the disease without requiring medical attention and without antiviral medicines.

Most important thing to remember to protect yourself and others is to consistently practice universal precautions – especially frequent hand washing.

Be well!

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