

## Frequently asked questions

# H1N1 Influenza 09

### **What is H1N1 Influenza 09?**

H1N1 Influenza 09, commonly known as 'swine flu', is a new type of influenza virus which causes respiratory disease in people.

### **How is 'swine flu' spread?**

The virus spreads from person to person in the same way as seasonal influenza which is via respiratory droplets from coughs and sneezes. It can also be spread when a person touches respiratory droplets on another person, object or surface and then touches their mouth or nose or food they are going to eat.

### **What are the symptoms?**

Symptoms of 'swine flu' appear to be similar to those of seasonal flu which include fever and cough or sore throat. You may also have a headache, runny or blocked nose, tiredness, body aches and in some instances diarrhoea and vomiting.

Like seasonal influenza, 'swine flu' may also cause a worsening of other underlying chronic medical conditions.

### **What is the current situation?**

The situation is constantly changing. For up to date information, please visit [www.flu.sa.gov.au](http://www.flu.sa.gov.au)

### **Who is at risk of catching 'swine flu'?**

Anyone can get 'swine flu' or seasonal flu. People who have had the seasonal flu vaccine for 2009 have a much lower chance of getting seasonal flu, but can still get 'swine flu'.

### **How serious is it?**

Although the 'swine flu' virus appears to be mild in most cases, it can cause severe illness in some people. Based on evidence from overseas, The Federal Government has indicated that the following vulnerable groups are at an increased risk of severe illness from the virus:-

- Pregnant women (particularly in second and third trimesters)
- People with morbid obesity
- People with chronic illnesses such as heart disease, renal disease, respiratory disease such as chronic obstructive airways disease (COAD), asthma requiring ongoing treatment, diabetes, or who are immunosuppressed from a specific disease or treatment

If you are in one of the vulnerable groups above, you should keep a careful eye on your health and avoid contact with anyone who has flu-like symptoms.

### **How is it diagnosed?**

The diagnosis is confirmed by laboratory examination of mucus from the back of the nose or throat, or by blood tests. In the current 'Protect' phase, not everyone who has symptoms will be tested for 'swine flu'. This will be decided on a case by case basis with the focus on people in the vulnerable groups listed above.

### **What is the incubation period?**

The time between becoming infected and developing symptoms is 1 – 7 days, in most cases it appears to be between 1 – 4 days.

### **When would I be contagious (able to spread the illness)?**

Based on current knowledge, an infected person can spread the infection to others from one day before the onset of symptoms and up to 7 days after the onset of symptoms. Children, especially younger children, may be contagious for longer periods.

### **What should I do if I think I have 'swine flu'?**

Not everyone who has flu (either seasonal or 'swine') needs to see a doctor. If you are otherwise healthy and have **mild** flu symptoms, you are asked to:-

- Stay at home and keep away from work, school and crowded areas or public gatherings until your fever has gone and you feel well
- Avoid contact with other people where possible
- **Wash** your hands regularly and always after coughing or sneezing. You can use soap and water or an alcohol based hand rub
- **Wipe** down frequently touched surfaces (such as remote controls or door knobs) regularly using detergent or a large alcohol wipe
- **Cover** your nose and mouth when coughing and sneezing and when using tissues, make sure you dispose of them carefully in a waste bin
- Rest, drink plenty of fluids and use a pain reliever for aches. This is adequate for recovery in most cases. A non-aspirin pain reliever should be used by children and teenagers

### **When should I seek medical advice?**

You should seek medical advice if you are concerned about your symptoms, if your symptoms become worse, or if you experience any of the following,

- shortness of breath
- difficulty breathing
- confusion
- inability to keep liquids down because of vomiting
- dehydration (dizzy when standing, passing much less urine than normal)

For parents with a young child, you should seek medical care immediately if your child has fast or strained/laboured breathing or if their health starts deteriorating.

### **Who should I speak to for medical advice?**

If you need medical advice, you should call your GP and find out if they can see you. If you can't see your GP, you should go to your nearest hospital with an Emergency

For advice over the phone, call the National Swine Flu Hotline on 180 2007.

### **Is there any treatment for 'swine flu'?**

'Swine flu' can be treated with the prescription antiviral medications oseltamivir (TamiFlu®) and zanamivir (Relenza®). Antiviral medications started within 48 hours of the onset of symptoms can reduce symptoms by about 1 day and prevent some of the more serious complications of flu.

There is currently no vaccine for 'swine flu' although work is underway to develop an effective vaccine.

Seasonal flu vaccine may not give protection against 'swine flu' but does provide protection against other circulating seasonal influenza virus types. Vaccination will also reduce the overall burden of seasonal influenza in the community and, in turn, reduce the burden on our hospitals and health system.

### **How do I get a prescription for antiviral medication?**

Your GP will continue to make decisions about whether you need antiviral medication or not.

If you are in one of the vulnerable groups specified by the Federal Government and are very ill, they can prescribe these antivirals free of charge to you from the Federal Government supply.

If you are not in a vulnerable group or your illness is mild, they can still prescribe antivirals if they feel they are necessary but you would need to pay for them as you would for seasonal flu antivirals in previous winters. These prescriptions can be filled at retail pharmacies, but there may be delays in obtaining medication if there are limited stocks.

Private prescriptions of antivirals for intending travellers (i.e. an antiviral medication prescription just-in-case some one becomes sick while they are away from home and travelling) are not encouraged. Appropriate prescribing of antiviral medications is important as it will help prevent depleting the supply in Australia and help prevent the development of drug resistance.

### **If I am suspected of having 'swine flu' and have been sent home, what should I do?**

If you are awaiting the result of tests for 'swine flu' and have been sent home, you should follow the instructions given to you by your doctor. Further information can be found in our Fact Sheets 'For patients with suspected H1N1 Influenza 09' and 'Home isolation'.

### **What measures can I take to prevent infection?**

General good hygiene can help to reduce the spread of all viruses, including 'swine flu'.

Information on how to control the spread of disease through good hygiene practices can be found in our Fact Sheet 'Good Hygiene Tips' or on our website [www.health.sa.gov.au/infectioncontrol](http://www.health.sa.gov.au/infectioncontrol)

### **Should I wear a mask to prevent becoming infected?**

If you are ill then wearing a mask may reduce the chance of you infecting others. If you are healthy, there is no need for you to wear a mask.

### **Is it safe to eat pig meat?**

Yes. There is no evidence that swine flu can be transmitted through eating meat from infected animals. Australia does not have swine flu in its domestic pigs.

### **Where can I get further advice?**

SA Health has produced a number of fact sheets on human swine influenza which are available to view through our website [www.flu.sa.gov.au](http://www.flu.sa.gov.au) . These fact sheets include frequently asked questions about schools and information to assist businesses.

For more information on hygiene processes, visit SA Health's Wash Wipe Cover website: [www.health.sa.gov.au/infectioncontrol](http://www.health.sa.gov.au/infectioncontrol)

**If you have further questions, please call the  
National Human Swine Influenza Hotline on 180 2007**