

Nationwide Children's Hospital

700 Children's Drive
Columbus, Ohio 43205
(614) 722-2000



Sign up for our free e-newsletter at NationwideChildrens.org

Swine Flu

Swine flu has become big news. But why is this flu with the strange name so important?

Swine flu has made a lot of people sick in Mexico and some have died. People in 10 countries, including the United States, are sick with this new type of flu. In the United States, people in 10 states have swine flu.

A lot of U.S. patients are recovering at home and have typical flu symptoms, like fever, sore throat and body aches. Some patients with more serious trouble, like breathing problems, are in hospitals. To avoid catching this flu, health experts recommend some very simple stuff, such as **washing your hands regularly and staying away from people who are sick**. In a few areas, where school students have swine flu, schools are closing temporarily to prevent the flu from spreading.

If someone gets swine flu, antiviral medicine can help the person get better. The flu is a virus so the medicine is called anti-viral. A virus is a germ, as you probably know, and germs are too small to be seen.

A Concern Worldwide

The nation has declared a "health emergency" so that medicine is available where it's needed. Around the world, many doctors and other health officials are watching the situation. Health experts think more people will get the illness and the numbers worldwide will grow.

If you've seen news reports, you might have been confused or felt worried. Sometimes on the news, people talk about what's happening right now. And sometimes they talk about the worst thing that could happen. If watching news reports upsets you, turn them off. Talk to your mom or dad if you have questions.

Swine = Pigs

Did you know that swine is another name for pigs? The swine flu gets its name because pigs carry this kind of flu. You can get this flu from pigs, but this outbreak seems to have been passed from person to person. Swine flu is not the same as the seasonal flu, which usually affects people in the fall and winter.

Because it's different, the seasonal flu shots that a lot of people get probably don't help with swine flu. But swine flu symptoms are similar to the regular flu: fever, body aches, sore throat, runny nose, and sometimes diarrhea and vomiting.

Just the Facts

Did you ever hear a TV detective say, "Just the facts, m'am?" In this kind of situation, that approach can be best. Let's stick with what we know. We know that some people have swine flu and we know that we want to keep the illness from spreading.

You might wonder what you should do. Should you do something? Most of us only need to take everyday measures to try to avoid getting sick. They are:

Swine Flu

- Wash your hands frequently, especially before eating.
- Try to avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth. That's how germs get in.
- Don't drink out of the same cup or share utensils (forks, spoons) with other people.
- Avoid people who are sick (coughing, fever etc.).

The advice is different for a person who is sick right now with flu symptoms, especially if he or she has been to Mexico recently or lives in an area where someone is known to be sick with swine flu.

- Anyone who is sick with flu symptoms and lives in an area that has reported cases of swine flu should go to the doctor to get checked out.
- Anyone who has flu symptoms and recently traveled to Mexico should go to the doctor, too. The illness appears to have started in Mexico.

Good Advice for Any Time

Anyone who's sick — with swine flu or any other contagious illness — should take steps so that other people don't catch it. Here are some that really help:

- Stay home from school (if you're a kid) or work (if you're a grownup).
- Sneeze or cough into a tissue instead of your hands. Then throw the tissue away. Then WASH

Expect to hear about swine flu for a while. It may be weeks or months before we know the whole story and how many people it will affect. In the meantime, keep those hands clean and be sure to tell your mom or dad if you have any concerns.

Reviewed by: Mary L. Gavin, MD
Date reviewed: April 2009

Note: All information is for educational purposes only. For specific medical advice, diagnoses, and treatment, consult your doctor.

© 1995- 2009 KidsHealth® All rights reserved.

