

Human Swine Influenza

Swine Influenza is a respiratory disease of pigs caused by type A influenza (H1N1) that regularly causes outbreaks of influenza among pigs. The classical swine flu was first isolated from a pig in 1930 and it is known to circulate among pig population since then.

The H1N1 swine flu viruses are antigenically different from Human H1N1 viruses and do not normally infect humans. However, sporadic cases happen mostly in direct exposure to pigs (such as workers in swine industry) with possibility in human-to-human transmission. The transmission channel is thought to occur in the same way as seasonal flu occurs in people, which is mainly person-to-person transmission through coughing or sneezing of people infected with the influenza virus.

Clinical Features

The symptoms are human influenza-like including fever, lethargy, lack of appetite and coughing. Some also have runny nose, sore throat, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea.

Prevention

Since H1N1 swine flu viruses are antigenically very different from human H1N1 viruses, vaccines for human seasonal flu would not provide protection from H1N1 swine flu viruses. There are no vaccines protecting H1N1 swine flu viruses recently. Precautionary measures including:

- Keep hands clean and wash hands properly with liquid soap and water. Alcohol-based hands cleaners are also effective when hands are not visibly soiled.
- Avoid touching eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands.
- Cover noses and mouth with tissues when coughing and sneezing. Throw the tissue in a lidded rubbish bin and wash hands immediately after that.
- Wash hands with liquid soap promptly if they are contaminated by respiratory tract secretions, e.g. after sneezing or coughing;
- Do not spit in public area. Wrap nasal and mouth discharges with a tissue, and throw the tissue in a lidded rubbish bin.
- Wear masks when symptoms or respiratory tract infection or fever develop and seek medical advice immediately, especially those who returned from affected areas.
- Avoid contact with people when influenza symptoms develop.
- Stay home from work or school and limit contact with people if you are feeling unwell.

Travel Advice

- Visit related websites (e.g. WHO, CDC) on the recommendation for areas you plan to visit.
- Pay attention to travel notice and health recommendations announced in the country when travel abroad.
- Postpone your trip if you have flu symptoms or fever.
- Maintain good personal hygiene habits during travel.
- Closely monitor your health for 7 days after return.
- If flu symptoms or fever developed within 7 days after travel abroad, consult doctors in hospitals immediately.

Vaccines are available to be given to pigs to prevent swine influenza but no vaccines to protect human from swine flu. The seasonal influenza vaccine will likely to provide partial protection against swine H3N2, but not swine H1N1 viruses.

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Committee on Health Promotion and Protection (http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/health_promote_protect/)