

Swine Flu

General Advice



What is swine flu?

Swine flu is a respiratory disease. The symptoms of swine flu are similar to those of regular seasonal flu infection and include fever, fatigue, lack of appetite, coughing and sore throat. For most people this illness is not severe. Infection with this flu is treatable with the antiviral drugs, oseltamavir (Tamiflu) and zanamivir (Relenza).

What does the move to a 'treatment phase' mean?

We have now moved into a 'treatment phase' to manage the swine flu pandemic. This means GPs will now diagnose cases on the basis of clinical observation rather than laboratory testing. Everyone who has flu-like symptoms will be assessed by a doctor and may be offered antivirals to manage their illness, if appropriate.

Routine swabbing of suspected cases has stopped and the Health Protection Agency no longer traces close contacts. The distribution of antiviral medicines for prevention is no longer normally recommended due to the virus being widespread within the community. This means that people are likely to be repeatedly exposed to the virus in their every day lives so such precautions are now ineffective.

What should I do if I think I might have swine flu?

People who think they have swine flu should first go online and check their symptoms on www.nhs.uk, or call NHS Direct on 0845 4647. Alternatively, they can call their own GP who will be able to provide a clinical diagnosis and appropriate advice on treatment over the phone. Further information is also available through the Swine Flu information line on 0800 1 513 513 or on the Health Protection Agency's website at www.hpa.org.uk/swineflu.

It is important to be aware that if people are diagnosed with swine flu they should stay at home until they are free of symptoms and have completed their course of antivirals if they have been prescribed. This is to avoid spreading the infection as much as possible.

What precautions should people take?

The only people who need to refrain from their normal activities (such as going to school or work) are those who have been diagnosed as having swine flu. People who have contact with a diagnosed case (e.g. at work or at home) do not need to stay away from either school or the workplace. As long as they have no symptoms they should continue with their normal daily routines. It is important to remember that flu is usually spread from one person to another only when an infected person has symptoms (e.g. coughing and sneezing).

What measures can people take to prevent infection?

General infection control practices and good respiratory hand hygiene can help to reduce transmission of all viruses, including swine flu. This includes:

- Covering your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing, using a tissue when possible.
- Disposing of dirty tissues promptly and carefully.
- Maintaining good basic hygiene, for example washing hands frequently with soap and water to reduce the spread of the virus from your hands to face or to other people.
- Cleaning hard surfaces (e.g. door handles) frequently using a normal cleaning product.
- Making sure your children follow this advice.