

## Swine Flu Updates

The United States government declared a public health emergency in connection with recent cases of swine flu in several parts of the country. Here are some every day actions people can take to avoid getting sick, and what to do if you become ill. Contact your doctor if you need treatment.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommends the following precautionary measures:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread that way.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- If you get sick, stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.
- People in affected areas who develop an illness with fever and respiratory symptoms, such as cough and runny nose, and possibly other symptoms, such as body aches, nausea, or vomiting or diarrhea, should contact their health care provider.

Please visit the CDC Web site ([www.cdc.gov/swineflu/index.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/index.htm)) for additional information.

**April 28, 2009**—A swine flu outbreak has sickened at least 64 people in the United States and prompted the [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services](#) (HHS) to issue a nationwide public health emergency declaration. This declaration is a tool that enables the HHS to take steps such as releasing funds to local public health agencies. The HHS also authorized the use of certain laboratory tests to help detect the virus and is distributing antiviral drugs.

“HHS is taking these steps today to be proactive in responding to this new influenza virus by offering national tools in support of community-led preparedness and response efforts,” said acting HHS Secretary Charles Johnson.

To date, cases have been confirmed in California, Kansas, Ohio, Texas and New York.

Swine flu is a respiratory disease that occurs regularly in pigs. Although human infections with this virus are not common, they do occur among people who have been in contact with pigs. Swine flu can also be transmitted between people.

The symptoms of swine flu are similar to those of regular human flu. They include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. With swine flu, you may also have vomiting and diarrhea.

If you have these symptoms, stay home to avoid spreading the illness. If you live in an area where swine flu has been identified, you may want to contact your doctor. There are antiviral medicines that can make your illness milder and shorter. These drugs work best if they are started within two days after symptoms start.

You can help protect yourself from infection by washing your hands often with soap and water. Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.

Additional cases of swine flu have been confirmed in other countries, including Mexico, where deaths from the illness have been reported.

In an attempt to help curb the spread of swine flu in the U.S., the CDC currently recommends that people avoid non-essential travel to Mexico.

For updates on swine flu, visit [www.cdc.gov/swineflu/index.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/index.htm).

Preventing swine flu: Do face masks help?

**April 30, 2009**—One of the more frequent images in news coverage of the swine flu outbreak is of people wearing face masks in public as they go about their daily activities. But how much protection do these masks offer?

That may depend on the type of mask you wear and whether you take other measures to prevent infection, according to health experts.

The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC) says that, whenever possible, it's better to avoid crowded settings and close contact with people who may be ill than to rely solely on masks for protection.

But when it's not possible to avoid these settings, masks could be helpful.

In general, there are two types of protective masks you might see in use. One is the type of face mask cleared by the [U.S. Food and Drug Administration](#) (FDA) to protect the wearer against droplets of blood or other bodily fluids.

The CDC notes that these face masks should be considered when spending time in crowded settings. They may protect the nose and mouth of the wearer from other people's coughs and may also help keep the wearer from coughing on other people.

Another type of protective gear is a filtering respirator often used in workplaces. Some of these—labeled as N95 respirators—are certified by the National Institute of Occupational Health and Safety to filter out at least 95 percent of very small airborne particles. A respirator looks much like a face mask but fits more tightly over the nose and mouth.

In 2007 the FDA approved two N95 respirators for use during public health emergencies like a flu pandemic. Made by the 3M Company, they are models 3M Respirator 8612F and 8670F. They are available without a prescription.

The CDC says respirators should be considered when spending time in close contact with an infected person—for example, when caring for an infected family member at home.

Exactly how much protection face masks or respirators offer when used in a community setting isn't known, according to the CDC. But they might help lower your risk for catching or transmitting the influenza virus, especially when used along with other preventive measures, such as:

- Avoiding close contact with people who appear ill.
- Washing your hands often and well.
- Staying healthy by getting enough sleep, eating a nutritious diet and staying active.

Be aware that both face masks and respirators are designed to be used once only and then thrown away. People with asthma, heart problems and other health conditions might find it hard to breathe through a respirator. Respirators also may not fit well on children, and a good fit is essential for a respirator to be effective.