

Iowa on Alert for Swine Flu

Physicians and the public advised to be watchful for disease symptoms

The Iowa Dept. of Public Health (IDPH) is urging Iowans and health care providers to be on alert for swine influenza in humans. As of today, no cases of swine flu have been identified in Iowa; however, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have confirmed 40 cases of the disease in the U.S. The confirmed cases are in California, Kansas, New York, Ohio and Texas. The U.S. cases appear linked to hundreds of cases reported in Mexico.

“Everyone must be alert in this situation,” said IDPH Medical Director, Dr. Patricia Quinlisk. “A public health emergency has been declared across the country. This means local health departments, health care providers and state health investigators in Iowa and across the nation are all watching closely for any signs of the disease.”

The swine influenza virus appears to be spread from one person to another. Swine influenza viruses are not transmitted by food, and a person cannot get swine flu from eating pork products. To date there are no identified cases found in hogs in the U.S.

As with seasonal influenza, Iowans are urged to help prevent the spread of swine flu by taking the following precautions:

- When you cough or sneeze, cover your nose and mouth with a tissue or your sleeve (if you do not have a tissue). Throw used tissues in a trash can.
- After you cough or sneeze, wash your hands with soap and water, or use an alcohol-based hand gel.
- If you are ill with a respiratory illness (coughing and sneezing), stay home from work or school so you don't make others sick.
- Avoid close contact with others who are coughing or appear to be ill.
- Symptoms of swine influenza include fever (greater than 100 F), along with cough, sore throat, headache and body aches, and extreme tiredness. Some people have also reported diarrhea and vomiting associated with swine flu. If you have any of these symptoms, contact your health care provider.

If you have recently visited Mexico or areas in the U.S. where swine influenza cases have been confirmed, and develop swine flu symptoms within seven to ten days after your return, it's important to contact your health care provider, and remind them to contact local public health officials.

“As always, with any influenza like illness, masks and hand sanitizing agents are available at the different hospital entrances. Individuals exhibiting symptoms are required to wear a mask, this helps protect health care workers and other patients,” says Joan Morris, Davis County Hospital Infection Control Nurse. “The hospital request that if you are ill for whatever reason, please do not visit the facility. If you require emergency services please present at the front desk for direction or call 911.”

Severe illness and deaths have been reported with swine flu infection in people in Mexico, however cases in the U.S. have been much milder. IDPH continues to work closely with local health departments and the CDC to monitor the situation.

If you would like more information about swine influenza, visit www.cdc.gov/swineflu/. The Iowa Department of Public Health is establishing a call center for the public to receive more information regarding the Swine Flu. That number will be released as soon as it becomes available.