

HELPFUL FACTS...
ABOUT THE SWINE FLU (H1N1)

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Human swine flu was originally called "swine flu" because it is similar to influenza viruses that infect pigs. The strain presently causing concern is a mutated form called Influenza virus A (H1N1) or human swine influenza which can be spread from human to human. It can also be passed on by people who are carrying the virus but show no outward signs of illness.

What are swine flu symptoms?

Symptoms of swine flu are like regular flu symptoms and include fever, cough, sore throat, runny nose, body aches, headache, chills, and fatigue. Many people with swine flu have had diarrhea and vomiting. Nearly everyone with flu has at least two of these symptoms. But these symptoms can also be caused by many other conditions. That means that you and your doctor can't know, just based on your symptoms, if you've got swine flu. Health care professionals may offer a rapid flu test, although a negative result doesn't necessarily mean you don't have the flu. Only lab tests can definitively show whether you've got swine flu.

Who is at highest risk from H1N1 swine flu?

Certain groups are at particularly high risk of severe disease or bad outcomes if they get the flu:

- Young children, especially those under 12-mths.
- Elderly people
- People with cardiovascular conditions (except high blood pressure), liver and kidney problems
- People with blood disorders (incl. sickle cell disease)
- People with neurologic, neuromuscular and metabolic disorders (incl. diabetes)
- People with immune suppression (incl. HIV infection and medications that suppress the immune system, such as cancer chemotherapy or anti-rejection drugs for transplants)
- Residents of a nursing home or other chronic-care facility

People in these groups should seek medical care as soon as they get flu symptoms.

How is swine flu treated?

Pandemic H1N1 swine flu virus is sensitive to the antiviral drugs Tamiflu and Relenza. These antiviral drugs are most effective when taken within 48 hours of the start of flu symptoms. However, not everyone needs those drugs. Most people who come down with swine flu recover fully without antiviral treatment.

Is there a vaccine against the new swine flu?

Yes. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved the new swine flu vaccine in September. Limited supplies have begun trickling out in the U.S. in the first week of October. However, this vaccine is not yet available in The Bahamas.

I had a flu vaccine this season. Am I protected against swine flu?

No. This season's flu vaccine does not protect against the new swine flu virus. However, the FDA has approved the new swine flu vaccine and there will be a new seasonal flu vaccine in the fall.

While the swine flu vaccine is not available locally at this time, this year it will be more important than ever to get a flu shot. It may not protect against swine flu – but it will keep you and others from getting seasonal flu viruses.

Is the flu vaccine safe?

Yes, the vaccine is safe. It is made from 3 different "killed" viruses each year. When given, it causes your immune system to make antibodies against those particular influenza viruses. Because the viruses are dead, they cannot infect you and cause you to get the flu. There are very few side effects. Your arm may feel sore for a few days, you may have a mild fever, feel tired or have sore muscles for a short period of time.

Note: *Should you have any further questions concerning the safety and effectiveness of the flu vaccine do not hesitate to contact your personal physician.*

How can I prevent swine flu infection?

The U.S. Centre for Disease Control (CDC) recommends taking these steps:

- Wash your hands regularly with soap and water, especially after coughing or sneezing, Or use an



alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.

- Avoid close contact – that is, being within 6-feet – with people who have flu-like symptoms
- Avoid touching your mouth, nose or eyes. That's not easy to do, so keep those hands clean
- If you have flu-like symptoms – fever plus at least cough or sore throat or other flu symptoms – stay home for seven days after symptoms begin or until you've been symptom-free for 24-hours – whichever is longer

How long does swine flu survive on surfaces?

Flu bugs can survive for hours on surfaces. One study showed that flu viruses can live for up to 48-hours on hard, nonporous surfaces such as stainless steel and for up to 12-hours on cloth and tissues. The virus seems to survive for only minutes on your hands – but that's plenty of time for you to transfer it to your mouth, nose or eyes.

What else should I be doing?

Keep informed of what's going on in your community. Your local health departments may have important information if swine flu develops in your area. Don't panic, but a little planning never hurts.