

Know the Facts: H1N1 Swine Flu



The World Health Organization (WHO) is referring to the H1N1 (also known as swine flu) situation as a "public-health emergency of international concern." However, several countries have reported the emergence of an entirely new strain of H1N1 virus, leading to the recent declaration of Phase 6 pandemic status by the World Health Organization.

What is Swine Flu?

Swine flu is a respiratory infection caused by influenza A viruses that usually only cause illness in pigs. While infrequent, pig-to-human transmission of swine flu is possible. Human-to-human transmission of true swine flu is uncommon. The recent outbreak of what is referred to as swine flu involves a new H1N1 type A influenza strain which is a genetic combination of swine, avian, and human influenza viruses. **This strain of the swine flu is capable of spreading from human to human easily.**

Symptoms

H1N1 swine flu symptoms are similar to those of regular or seasonal flu, and include:

- Fever
- Lethargy or tiredness
- Coughing
- Runny nose and sore throat
- Lack of appetite
- Headache or body aches

For the elderly and young, flu vaccines can be crucial, but only work when designed for a specific flu strain. Seek emergency medical care if any of the following warning signs become evident:

- Fever with a rash
- Dehydration
- Fast breathing
- Bluish skin coloration
- Slow to wake or sluggish interaction
- Flu-like symptoms improve, but then return and cough worsens
- Severe irritability

For adults, seek emergency medical care if experiencing these warning signs:

- Difficulty breathing
- Dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Pain/pressure in the chest or stomach

Remember that the symptoms for swine flu are almost identical to those experienced with the regular flu. **Only a doctor can make the correct diagnosis.**

Prevention

Proper hygiene and health practices are the best defense.

- Wash hands frequently with soap and hot water
- Use an alcohol based hand sanitizer when soap and water are not accessible
- Avoid touching your face
- Cough or sneeze into the bend of the elbow
- Properly dispose of used tissues
- Avoid people with respiratory illness
- Stay home when sick
- Seek care at the onset of flu-like symptoms
- Eat a balanced diet and get enough sleep



Medication Intervention

Medicines such as Tamiflu and Relenza block the action of the N protein so the virus can not spread. They are not vaccines to prevent an infection, but drugs to limit its impact. They should be taken as soon as possible, since the virus reproduces most rapidly between 24 and 72 hours after illness begins.



The Next Step

Some immediate steps that are critical for businesses to protect employees, customers, additional stakeholders, and business assets include the following:

1. Create a process for cascading critical messages to employees
2. Determine who essential and non-essential employees are within your organization
3. Develop a protocol to facilitate home working arrangements for employees
4. Look at succession planning for all levels of the organization
5. Construct a plan of action should an employee be suspected of having A/H1N1 swine influenza and has been in the workplace days before the onset of symptoms
6. Reviews of company travel, hygiene, and medical screening, and providing anti-bacterial sanitizer, masks, and other materials, are also suggested
7. Inform employees of any travel protocols/restrictions in place

The focus of business continuity planning and management should be to reduce exposure, proactive mitigation techniques, communication, minimize peaks of absenteeism, and plan for any possible recurrence of flu.

Links of Interest

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention - www.cdc.gov
- World Health Organization - www.who.int