

SWINE FLU FAST FACTS

At least 81 people have died from severe pneumonia caused by the A/H1N1 strain of the swine flu virus in Mexico. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has declared swine flu as a public health emergency of "pandemic potential." Mexico has closed most public places in a bid to contain the outbreak, which may have infected about 1,000 people there. Some of those who died are confirmed to have a unique version of the A/H1N1 flu virus that is a combination of bird, pig and human viruses. US authorities said 11 people in the southern parts of the United States were infected with swine flu.



1 What is swine influenza?

It is a respiratory disease of pigs caused by type A strains of the influenza virus. It regularly causes high flu outbreaks in pigs but with low death rates. There are four main sub-types of the virus, but the most recent isolated influenza viruses from pigs have been H1N1 viruses.

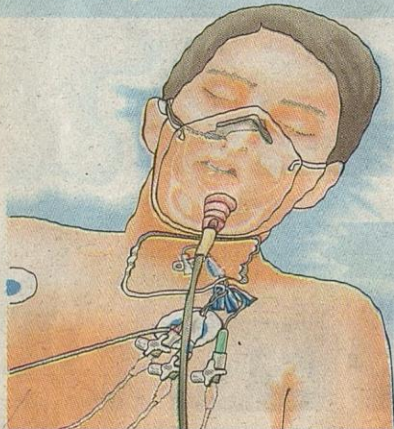


2 How does it spread?

Swine flu viruses do not typically infect humans, although they do occur through close proximity or contact with infected pigs or contaminated areas. Cases of human-to-human spread have been documented.

3 What are the symptoms?

Similar to those of regular flu: fever, lethargy, runny nose, cough, sore throat and lack of appetite. Some people have also reported vomiting and diarrhoea.



4 How common is swine flu infection in humans?

In the past, reports of about one human swine flu virus infection had been received every one to two years in the United States, but from December 2005 till this February, 12 cases have been reported.

5 Has this strain of flu been seen before?

No. Flu mutates constantly, so it is common for new strains to emerge. Pigs can also be infected with both human and avian influenza, and the current circulating swine flu strain appears to contain genetic elements from all three.

6 Can swine flu be treated with antiviral drugs and flu vaccine?

The swine flu is resistant to two common drugs – Amantadine and Rimantadine. The H1N1 swine flu viruses are very different from human H1N1 viruses. Therefore, vaccines for human seasonal flu would not provide protection. However, a "seed vaccine" has been specifically tailored to this swine flu and will be manufactured if officials deem it necessary.

7 Can people catch swine flu from eating pork?

No. Swine influenza viruses are not transmitted by food. Eating properly handled and cooked pork and pork products is safe. Cooking pork to an internal temperature of 70°C and above kills the swine flu virus.



8 Are there any travel restrictions in place?

None yet, although there are precautions. In South-East Asia, Malaysia and Japan's international airports have stepped up health surveillance, while the Philippines may quarantine feverish passengers who have been to Mexico. Thailand and Hong Kong said they are closely monitoring the situation.

