

04/29/09

Dear Parents,

In April, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention began tracking cases of swine influenza A (H1N1) virus infection in individuals in the United States and worldwide. **At this time, there are no reported or suspected cases of the swine flu among students or staff members in the Blue Springs School District.**

As with any potential for infectious disease, our Health Services Department is working closely with the Jackson County Health Department to help ensure a healthy and safe environment for students. Health Services staff members routinely track flu-like symptoms within schools and report them to county officials. In addition, we take precautions to clean and sanitize surfaces which have the potential to spread illness. Contact surfaces (countertops, sinks, restroom fixtures and drinking fountains) are disinfected and student desks are cleaned on a regular basis by the custodial staff.

Staff members across the district have attended the Blue Springs School District Emergency Services training sessions regarding the possibility of a pandemic flu virus, and a plan has been included in our district readiness protocol. We will continue to monitor this particular situation and keep you informed.

Influenza viruses are mainly transmitted from person to person when an infected person coughs or sneezes. A lesser mode of transmission occurs when a person touches something that has the flu virus on it and then touches his or her mouth, eyes or nose. A few tips that will help children and adults stay healthy include:

- Practice frequent hand washing using soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds. You may also use hand sanitizer when it is difficult to wash your hands.
- Avoid touching your mouth, nose and eyes because the virus can spread when your hands touch surfaces infested with germs.
- Remember to cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing and sneezing. If a tissue is not available, you are encouraged to sneeze or cough into the upper portion of your shirt sleeve and avoid sneezing or coughing into your hands (which are more likely to touch surfaces and other people and spread the disease).
- Do not share drinks, water bottles, eating utensils or cell phones with others.
- Practice “social distancing,” especially in the case of a flu outbreak. Stand at least three feet away from others if you or the other person is infected with the flu.
- If you are sick with the flu, stay home to prevent spreading it to others at school and in the workplace.
- Remember, only your doctor can give you the correct diagnosis and treatment
- If your doctor suspects you or your child has contracted the swine influenza A, please contact the school your child attends to report it immediately.

For additional information about preparing for the pandemic flu, a helpful booklet from the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services is available at http://www.dhss.mo.gov/Ready_in_3/PanFluCommunityGuide.pdf. For up-to-date information about the swine flu outbreak, which is not currently designated as a pandemic, visit the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) web site at <http://www.cdc.gov/> and select “swine flu.” The CDC web site also includes tips on how to stay healthy.

Thank You,
Blue Springs School District Health Services

Swine Flu Q & A

by the Editors of MSN Health

What is swine flu?

Swine flu is a respiratory disease normally found in pigs and caused by type A influenza viruses. While outbreaks of this type of flu are most common in pigs, human cases of swine flu do happen. In the past, reports of human swine flu have been rare—approximately one infection every one to two years in the United States. From December 2005 through February 2009, only 12 cases of human infection were documented.

How is it spread?

Humans with direct exposure to pigs are those most commonly infected with swine flu. Human-to-human spread of swine flu viruses have been documented; however, it's not known how easily the spread occurs. Just as the common flu is passed along, swine flu is thought to be spread by coughing, sneezing, or touching something that has the live virus on it.

If infected, a person may be able to infect another person one day before symptoms develop; therefore, a person is able to pass the flu on before they know they are sick. Infected individuals may spread the virus for seven or more days after becoming sick. Those with swine flu should be considered potentially contagious as long as they are showing symptoms, and up to seven days or longer from the onset of their illness. Children might be contagious for longer periods of time.

Can I catch swine flu from eating pork?

No. The CDC says that swine flu viruses are not transmitted by food. Properly cooking pork to an internal temperature of 160°F kills all bacteria and viruses.

What are the symptoms of swine flu?

Symptoms of swine flu are similar to those of a regular flu: fever and chills, sore throat, cough, headache, body aches, and fatigue. Diarrhea and vomiting can also be present. Without a specific lab test, it is impossible to know whether you may be suffering from swine flu or another flu strain, or a different disease entirely.

What precautionary measures should I take?

The same everyday precautions that you take to prevent other contagious viruses should be used to protect yourself against swine flu. “The best current advice is for individuals to practice good hand hygiene. Periodic hand washing with soap and water, or the use of an alcohol-based hand sanitizer when hand washing is not possible, is a good preventive measure. Also, avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth, as germs can more easily gain entrance into your body through those areas,” suggests Rob Danoff, D.O., an MSN health expert. Covering your

mouth with a disposable tissue when you cough and sneeze is also a good practice.

The CDC recommends avoiding contact with sick people and keeping your own good health in check with adequate sleep, exercise, and a nutritious diet.

What should you do if you think you are sick with swine flu?

Contact your health care professional, inform them of your symptoms, and ask whether you should be tested for swine flu. Be prepared to give details on how long you've been feeling ill and about any recent travels. Your health care provider will determine whether influenza testing or treatment is needed. If you feel sick, but are not sure what illness you may have, stay home until you have been diagnosed properly to avoid spreading any infection.

Watch for these symptoms in children. Seek emergency medical care if your child experiences any of the following warning signs:

- 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, emergency medical care is needed if you experience these warning signs:

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

Remember that the symptoms for swine flu are almost identical to those you might experience with the regular flu. Only your doctor can give you the correct diagnosis.

Are there medicines effective in treating swine flu in humans?

The current strain of the swine flu appears to respond to the use of oseltamivir (Tamiflu) or zanamivir (Relenza) for those infected. For treatment, these antiviral drugs work best if started soon after getting sick (within two days of the appearance of symptoms).

