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Subject: Swine Flu Preparedness
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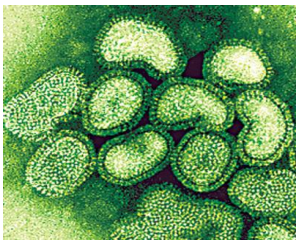
What do I need to know About the Swine Flu?



The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recently declared a nationwide public health emergency due to the emergence of human clusters of Swine Influenza. Investigations continue to understand the disease and its current and potential impact. While no pandemic currently exists, the possibility remains.

O'Brien's Response Management (O'Brien'sRM) is ready to respond to your planning and preparedness needs. Our team has written numerous Business Continuity Plans that include procedures for dealing with Pandemic Influenza for various local and state agencies and private businesses. We've also trained and exercised thousands of people (government officials and private industry professionals) on influenza preparedness and planning.

Here are some questions employers may be asking themselves.

Q: What is swine influenza and how do I get it?
A: Swine influenza, or "swine flu", is a highly contagious acute respiratory disease of pigs, caused by one of several swine influenza A viruses. The virus is spread among pigs by aerosols, direct and indirect contact, and asymptomatic carrier pigs. People usually get swine influenza from infected pigs, however, some human cases lack contact history with pigs or environments where pigs have been located. Human-to-human transmission has occurred in some instances but was limited to close contacts and closed groups of people. (World Health Organization)

Q: What are the implications for human health?
A: Outbreaks and sporadic human infection with swine influenza have been occasionally reported. Generally clinical symptoms are similar to seasonal influenza but reported clinical presentation ranges broadly from asymptomatic infection to severe pneumonia resulting in death. (World Health Organization)

Q: What can my company or agency do?
A: Convene emergency planning teams to review and update your flu and Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP)/Business Continuity Plan (BCP) and include specific Pandemic Influenza elements. Communicate with employees and monitor the situation. Review existing HR policies regarding employee sick leave. Also, confirm the availability of resources to support a pandemic response. If a confirmed influenza outbreak exists near your facility, consider specific additional actions according to your plans, such as employee health screening, reductions in force, and mandatory respiratory protection.

Q: Is it safe for my employees to travel?
A: As of April 28, 2009, the CDC has recommended that nonessential travel to Mexico be avoided. Current travel precautions and future updates can be found at www.cdc.gov.

Q: What's the best source of information?

A: Refer to your local health department. For national updates and guidance go the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website www.cdc.gov or www.pandemicflu.gov. For international updates visit the World Health Organization (WHO) website at www.who.int.

Q: What if my company doesn't have a flu plan?
A. Consider updating your COOP/BCP and other emergency response plans to reflect flu planning preparations and response procedures.

Q: Are there any local contingency planning professionals who can help my company?
A: Yes, O'Brien's Response Management has planning professionals, including experienced public health epidemiologists and business continuity planners.

Q: What should we tell our employees who are concerned about this turning into a pandemic?
A: There is no flu pandemic currently. To minimize the spread of any viral disease in the workplace, encourage good health and hygiene practices at all times. Follow local health department guidance.

Q: Are businesses required to have a flu plan?
A: There is no government requirement but it is highly recommended that companies plan to protect themselves and their employees from flu-imposed disruptions to business.

Q: Is it safe to eat pork and pork products?
A: Yes. Swine influenza has not been shown to be transmissible to people through eating properly handled and prepared pork (pig meat) or other products derived from pigs. The swine influenza virus is killed by cooking temperatures of 160F/70C, corresponding to the general guidance for the preparation of pork and other meat. (World Health Organization)

Q: What about the pandemic risk?
A: It is likely that most people, especially those who do not have regular contact with pigs, do not have immunity to swine influenza viruses that can prevent the virus infection. If a swine virus establishes efficient human-to human transmission, it can cause an influenza pandemic. The impact of a pandemic caused by such a virus is difficult to predict: it depends on virulence of the virus, existing immunity among people, cross protection by antibodies acquired from seasonal influenza infection and host factors. (World Health Organization)

Q: Is there a human vaccine to protect from swine influenza?
A: There are no vaccines that contain the current swine influenza virus causing illness in humans. It is not known whether current human seasonal influenza vaccines can provide any protection. Influenza viruses change very quickly. It is important to develop a vaccine against the currently circulating virus strain for it to provide maximum protection to the vaccinated people. (World Health Organization)

Q: What drugs are available for treatment?
A: There are two classes of such medicines, 1) adamantanes (amantadine and remantadine), and 2) inhibitors of influenza neuraminidase (oseltamivir and zanamivir). Most of the individuals previously reported to have contracted swine influenza recovered fully from the disease without requiring medical attention and without antiviral medicines. (World Health Organization)

Q: How can I protect myself from getting swine influenza from infected people?
A: In the past, human infection with swine influenza was generally mild but is known to have caused severe illness such as pneumonia For the current outbreaks in the United States and Mexico however, the clinical pictures have been different. None of the confirmed cases in the United States have had the severe form of the disease and the patients recovered from illness without requiring medical care. In Mexico, some patients reportedly had the severe form of the disease and there have been reported fatalities.

To protect yourself, practice general preventive measures for influenza:

- Avoid close contact with people who appear unwell and who have fever and cough.
- Wash your hands with soap and water frequently and thoroughly.
- Practice good health habits including adequate sleep, eating nutritious food, and keeping physically active.

If there is an ill person at home:

- Try to provide the ill person in a separate section in the house. If this is not possible, keep the patient at least 1 meter in distance from others.
- Cover mouth and nose when caring for the ill person. Masks can be bought commercially and the CDC recommends that nay mask conform to the N95 standard.
- Wash your hands with soap and water thoroughly after each contact with the ill person.
- Try to improve the air flow in the area where the ill person stays. Use doors and windows to take advantage of breezes.
- Promptly and properly dispose of tissues and other disposable items used by the infected individual.
- Keep the environment clean with readily available household cleaning agents. (World Health Organization)

Q: What should I do if I think I have swine influenza?
A: If you feel unwell, have high fever, cough and/or sore throat:

- If your symptoms are severe contact your family physician, visit a hospital emergency room or call 911.
- Stay at home and keep away from work, school or crowds as much as possible.
- Rest and take plenty of fluids.
- Cover your mouth and nose with disposable tissues when coughing and sneezing and dispose of the used tissues properly.
- Wear a disposable mask or other respiratory protection.
- Wash your hands with soap and water frequently and thoroughly, especially after coughing or sneezing.
- Inform family and friends about your illness and seek help for household chores that require contact with other people such as shopping. (World Health Organization)

QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS

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