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Swine Flu

The World Health Organization (WHO) has raised the level of influenza pandemic alert to Phase 5. Toronto Public Health is working with the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and the Public Health Agency of Canada to monitor and investigate the illness.

The majority of people with swine flu in the United States and Canada have had mild illness.

If you have been to Mexico and are experiencing flu-like symptoms:

Stay home. Distance yourself from others around you. If you are sick enough to require medical attention, call your doctor. Tell them that you are sick and have travelled to Mexico in the last 7 days. Most cases of human swine flu in Canada and the U.S. have been mild, and people recover fully at home without the need for medical care.

If you have been to Mexico and are well:

Continue with your normal daily routines - there is no need to stay home. Watch for symptoms of flu. Please do not seek medical attention if you are feeling well.

If you have general questions about swine flu, call [TeleHealth Ontario](http://www.18667970000.ca) at 1-866-797-0000.

If you are a healthcare provider and have questions about patient care and swine flu, call 1-866-212-2272 or go to <http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/providers/program/emu/ihn.html>.

If you are looking for travel advice, go to <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/tmp-pmv/pub-eng.php>.

What is swine flu?

Swine flu is a variant of normal seasonal influenza that contains bits of viruses from birds, pigs and humans. People with swine flu experience many of the same symptoms as with regular seasonal flu:

Fever	Weakness/fatigue
Headache	Nausea
Cough	Vomiting
Muscle aches	Diarrhea
Sore Throat	Chills

How is swine flu spread?

We are still investigating how swine flu is transmitted but it is likely spread from person to person via the respiratory route, the same as seasonal influenza. Coughs and sneezes release the germs into the air where they can be breathed in by others. Germs can also rest on hard surfaces like counters and doorknobs, where they can be picked up on hands and transmitted to the respiratory system when someone touches their mouth and/or nose.

Influenza can be passed to others up to 24 hours before illness starts. It appears that swine flu can be spread for up to 7 days after illness starts. Children may spread the virus for longer periods. Initial investigation shows that the incubation period of the human swine influenza is between two and seven days.

How can I avoid getting swine flu?

You can decrease your risk of getting swine flu by washing your hands, coughing and sneezing into a tissue, and staying home when you feel ill. If you do not have a tissue, sneeze or cough into your sleeve or arm.

How severe is the human swine flu?

The majority of cases of swine flu reported in Canada and the United States have been mild. Some of the cases reported in Mexico have been more severe, involving primarily healthy young people who rapidly progressed from mild illness to severe respiratory distress. Some illnesses have resulted in death. The Public Health Agency of Canada has been working with the WHO, Mexican and American health officials to determine why cases in Mexico appear to be more severe.

Is there a treatment for swine flu?

It appears that Tamiflu (oseltamivir) and Relenza (zanamavir) work to combat swine flu, so these drugs can be used to treat severe swine flu cases if treatment is started within two days of symptom onset. Mild illness that appears to be going away on its own does not require treatment. Swine flu is resistant to amantadine.

Is there a vaccine for swine flu?

There is currently no vaccine available for swine flu. Canada has a contract with a vaccine manufacturer for vaccine production in the event of a pandemic. Once the pandemic strain has been confirmed, it may take up to six months for an effective vaccine to be developed and tested. The contract covers the production of enough pandemic vaccine for all Canadians.

Can I get swine flu from eating pork?

No. Cooking destroys the virus.

What should I do if I've been to Mexico and I have symptoms of a respiratory illness?

If you have recently travelled to Mexico and are feeling ill enough that you need to seek medical attention, be sure to call ahead to discuss your symptoms and travel history. If symptoms require you to go to a hospital or urgent care clinic, tell the hospital or clinic immediately that you have travelled to Mexico in the last 7 days. A travel history alone does not warrant seeking medical care if you do not feel ill enough to require it.

Should I travel to Mexico or one of the other affected areas?

The Federal government through Public Health Agency of Canada and Foreign Affairs is responsible for issuing travel advice to Canadians. Travel advisories can be found at <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/tmp-pmv/pub-eng.php> and http://www.voyage.gc.ca/countries_pays/menu-eng.asp

What should I do if someone I know is coming to Canada from Mexico?

There are no restrictions for individuals travelling from Mexico. If someone coming from Mexico becomes ill in Canada with signs and symptoms of swine flu and requires medical attention, be sure to call ahead to discuss their symptoms and travel history. If symptoms require them to go to a hospital or urgent care clinic, tell the hospital or clinic immediately that the person has come from Mexico in the last 7 days.

Is this the next influenza pandemic?

The WHO raised the pandemic influenza alert level to Phase 5. According to the WHO, Phase 5 "is characterized by human-to-human spread of the virus into at least two countries in one WHO region. While most countries will not be affected at this stage, the declaration of Phase 5 is a strong signal that a pandemic is imminent and that the time to finalize the organization, communication, and implementation of the planned mitigation measures is short."

Where can I get more information?

- **Toronto Public Health** is providing ongoing updates at www.toronto.ca/health.
- **Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care** <http://www.health.gov.on.ca>
- **Public Health Agency of Canada** <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/index-eng.php>
PHAC's toll-free information number: 1-800-454-8302
- **World Health Organization** <http://www.who.int>