



Swine Influenza

28 April

Media Release

Note: We will be holding a media tele-conference at 3.45pm today with Otago and Southland Medical Officer of Health Dr Derek Bell. Please contact 083033 and then pin number 844594.

We have contacted all the people from Otago and Southland who we know were on Flight NZ1 and none of them are ill.

That is a total of 23 people. As a precaution, they have all been asked to go into voluntary quarantine and have been offered the antiviral medication Tamiflu.

As every day passes, the risk of those people falling ill decreases, Otago and Southland Medical Officer of Health Dr Marion Poore says.

We will have two nurses at Dunedin International Airport to meet the international flight from Brisbane about 2.50pm today, to support border staff. We will also have a nurse presence for the other flight arriving in Dunedin from Brisbane on Saturday and for the three international flights expected from Sydney at Queenstown Airport.

At this stage, we are not expecting any ships to arrive at Bluff or Port Chalmers after being in the affected areas in Mexico and the United States at the relevant time.

We would like to remind people that anyone with concerns about swine flu should not just turn up at hospitals or medical centres. They should phone them to discuss their situation first or phone the free national Healthline on 0800 611 116.

Symptoms of influenza usually include:

- Sudden onset of illness
- Fever higher than 38 degrees Celsius
- Coughing and sneezing
- Aches and pains
- Headaches
- Vomiting and diarrhoea

The most important steps we can all take to prevent or reduce the spread of disease in our community are:

- Wash hands with soap and water and dry them well. This is especially important after going to the toilet and before preparing/eating food.
- Cover sneezes and coughs with a tissue, and throw it in a bin. Wash hands.

- Cough or sneeze into your elbow, NOT your hands.
- Sick staff or students should stay at home, until they are well.
- If a person in your home is sick, try to keep a distance of one metre, and avoid sharing utensils, cups etc.

Hand Hygiene

Following this procedure will ensure effective hand hygiene is performed:

Figure 1. Hand Hygiene Technique



1. Palm to palm.



2. Right palm over left back of hand



3. Palm to palm fingers interlaced and left palm over right back of hand.



4. Backs of fingers to opposing palms with fingers interlocked.



5. Rotational rubbing of right thumb clapsed in left palm and vice versa.



6. Rotational rubbing backwards and forwards with clapsed fingers of right hand in left palm and vice versa.

Reference: Hand washing technique
(Alliffe et al 1978; Lawrence 1985)

People should use the 20-20 rule – wash their hands for 20 seconds with warm soapy water and dry thoroughly with clean towels or paper towels for another 20 seconds.

For further information, please contact Otago District Health Board Communications Officer Gail Goodger on 0275 678281.

Questions and Answers

What is swine influenza?

Swine influenza, or "swine flu", is a highly contagious acute respiratory disease of pigs, caused by one of several swine influenza A viruses.

Outbreaks in pigs occur year round, with an increased incidence in the fall and winter in temperate zones. Many countries routinely vaccinate swine populations against swine influenza.

Swine influenza viruses are most commonly of the H1N1 subtype, but other subtypes are also circulating in pigs (e.g., H1N2, H3N1, H3N2). Pigs can also be infected with avian influenza viruses and human seasonal influenza viruses as well as swine influenza viruses. Sometimes pigs can be infected with more than one virus type at a time, which can allow the genes from these viruses to mix. This can result in an influenza virus containing genes from a number of sources, called a "reassortant" virus. Although swine influenza viruses are normally species-specific and only infect pigs, they do sometimes cross the species barrier to cause disease in humans.

Is there a human vaccine to protect from swine influenza?

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. This is why WHO needs access to as many viruses as possible in order to select the most appropriate candidate vaccine virus.

How virulent is swine flu in humans?

Most of the previously reported swine influenza cases recovered fully from the disease without requiring medical attention and without antiviral medicines.

How can I protect myself from getting swine influenza from infected people?

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.

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.