H1N1 influenza (swine flu) [1]

(1) Dear Alice,

I know some people that have swine flu and I've been in contact with someone who lives with them. Will I now get it?

(2) Hello Alice,

I want to know which is the incubation period for the swine flu?? Thanks!

(3) Dear Alice,

I got a flu shot last November and, so far, so good. I haven't been sick at all, even though I have shared close quarters with people who have been sick. I'm wondering whether that flu shot I received offers any protection against this current swine flu going around. And would it be helpful for others to immunize themselves right now? Please let me know.

?Hopefully Protected

Answer

Dear Readers #1, #2, and Hopefully Protected,

Swine flu is the common name for Influenza A (H1N1) and is so named because it is a strain of flu virus commonly found in pigs. Despite its name, it is possible for humans to transmit the infection to other humans.

This virus seems to have a relatively short incubation period and most people who contract it will become ill 3 to 5 days after being exposed. However, after the 2009 outbreak, public health authorities recommend closely monitoring how you feel for 7 days after a possible exposure. Symptoms of the H1N1 flu are similar to other influenza infections, and include:

- Possibly fever
- Feeling tired, lethargy
- Lack of appetite
- Coughing
- Possibly nausea and vomiting
- Possibly diarrhea

If you are experiencing flu-like symptoms and have reason to believe you have been exposed to the virus, it’s important to get rest and avoid going to work or other public places while you are ill (adults with the flu are typically contagious for a week). Many cases of the H1N1 flu in the U.S. have been mild and sick people have recovered within a few days to a week.

If you are having flu symptoms, you can contact your health care provider, who may be able to provide treatment that eases symptoms. If you have severe symptoms, like difficulty breathing, it is important to get medical care right away. More information about H1N1 and other forms of the flu is available on the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [2].

Strategies to prevent transmission of this or any type of flu, include:

- Washing hands frequently or using alcohol-based hand sanitizer
- Covering your cough or sneeze with a tissue, or coughing into your upper sleeve (avoid coughing directly onto your hands)
- Avoiding contact with people who are ill
- Cleaning frequently touched objects, like phones

A vaccine for the H1N1 strain of the flu has been approved and is available across the United States. In 2013 the standard flu vaccine was made to provide protection against H1N1. Remember, flu vaccines only last for one season, so to gain protection against the current year’s flu strains it’s important to get a vaccine each year.

Because flu symptoms resulting from H1N1 have been relatively mild, treatment is the same as standard treatment for any flu virus. This means getting lots of rest and fluids, taking a fever-reducer, staying away from public places, and monitoring symptoms. Anti-viral flu treatments may be prescribed for people who test positive for any strain of influenza virus (including H1N1) and are best if started within 48 hours of the first symptoms. The Centers for Disease Control are not recommending that health care providers test to determine which strain of the flu a person may have. For most people, because there is no difference in treatment, it is not necessary to determine which flu strain is causing illness. **It is important to remember that antibiotics will not help against any type of flu.**

For the curious, pork products do not pose any risk of transmitting swine flu and are safe to eat when properly handled and prepared. Typical flu pathways, such as coughing and not washing hands, are the routes of transmission for this illness, so personal hygiene and limiting contact with people who are sick is the best way to prevent infection. If you’re feeling flu-ish, rest, pay attention to your symptoms, and consider visiting or calling your health care provider.

Take care,

Alice!

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Colds & Flu [6]

Related questions

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Do I have a cold or the flu? [10]

Resources

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