City Officials Provide Update On Swine Flu Preparedness

No Cases Yet, But Everyone Should "Think Prevention"

While at the moment there are not any known cases of swine flu in Chicago, now is the time for all Chicagoans to "think prevention and preparedness," City officials said today.

"We take influenza seriously, and we expect all Chicagoans to do the same," stated Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH) Commissioner Terry Mason, M.D. "Every year in the city, we administer many thousands of flu shots---and we maintain an effective surveillance system with dozens of hospitals and a select number of outpatient clinics across the city."

The swine flu update was held at the Chicago Office of Emergency Management and Communications (OEMC) headquarters on the Near West Side. Joining Dr. Mason were OEMC Executive Director Raymond Orozco, as well as Chicago Public Schools CEO Ron Huberman, who gave an update on CPS preparedness efforts. CDPH officials joining Dr. Mason were Deputy Commissioner and Chief Medical Officer Dr. Susan Gerber and Immunization Program Medical Director Dr. Julie Morita.

"Like with any situation in Chicago, OEMC has been coordinating across departments to ensure that we are as prepared as we can be," said OEMC Executive Director Raymond Orozco. "These are precautionary measures and residents should not be alarmed. We just want residents to be informed so they can better prepare themselves and their families."
There are no known cases of swine flu at the moment----but Dr. Mason and other CDPH officials said they expect that to change, given the spread of swine flu elsewhere across the U.S. and internationally.

CPS CEO Ron Huberman stated that Chicago Public Schools will be coordinating health and safety measures with the CDPH to monitor and report any unusual symptoms that may be linked to the new strain of swine flu.

"At this time, Chicago Public Schools has no confirmed reports of this illness, and we are in the process of launching our internal notifications to ensure that our principals and faculty take the necessary precautions and proactive action measures if any incidents are observed or reported," Huberman said. "Just as we would respond to any unusual health situation, we urge parents to immediately notify their family physician if they observe any unusual patterns of illness with their children, followed by prompt notification to the school's principal and or infirmary."

Huberman added that with more than 600 CPS schools and 400,000 students citywide, CPS "must lean forward in our preparedness efforts, and will do so with care and caution....not panic."

CDPH is in continuous contact with suburban health departments, the Illinois Department of Public Health, and officials at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

The Health Department also is briefing other City departments and sister agencies---including the Chicago Public Schools---and partners in the private sector, Dr. Mason added.

"I want everyone to keep in mind that it is very early, and the situation is fluid. This strain of swine flu is a new strain----and not a lot is known about it---like exactly how ill infected persons become, how easily it may be passed from person to person, and so forth," Dr. Mason said.

The few cases that have been identified thus far in the U.S. have been relatively mild---and while City officials hope that trend continues, they said there is no guarantee that it will.

"But even though we have not yet seen cases of this new swine flu in Chicago, now---right now---is the time for all
Chicagans to “think prevention” and “think preparedness,”
Dr. Mason said.

Specifically, CDPH calls upon all Chicagans to:

** Cover your cough.
** Cover your sneeze.
** Use facial tissues and discard them promptly.
** Wash your hands regularly with soap and warm water.
** And teach these good habits to your children.
** If you are sick, stay home and get better. Do not spread a cold or flu at work, at school, at a store, at your church or other house of worship, or anywhere. Protect yourself and protect others.
** Finally, boost your immune system by eating fresh vegetables and fruit, drinking plenty of water, and getting enough sleep at night.

The symptoms of swine flu in people are similar to the symptoms of regular human flu and include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people have reported diarrhea and vomiting associated with swine flu. In the past, severe illness (pneumonia and respiratory failure) and deaths have been reported with swine flu infection in people. Like seasonal flu, swine flu may cause a worsening of underlying chronic medical conditions.

People who believe they have these symptoms should call their doctor or other regular health care provider, just as they would do if they suspected they had any type of flu.

City officials said they would update the press and public in the days to come, as more events unfold and more relevant, helpful information becomes available.

For a national perspective on swine flu, go online to www.cdc.gov/swineflu.

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Swine Flu Questions and Answers

What is swine flu?
Swine Influenza (swine flu) is a respiratory disease of pigs caused by type A influenza viruses. Outbreaks of swine flu happen regularly in pigs. People do not normally get swine flu, but human infections can and do happen. Most commonly, human cases of swine flu happen in people who are around pigs but it’s possible for swine flu viruses to spread from person to person also.

Are there human infections with swine flu in the U.S.?
Cases of human infection with swine influenza A (H1N1) viruses have been confirmed in the United States. CDC and local and state health agencies are working together to investigate this situation.

Is this swine flu virus contagious?
CDC has determined that this virus is contagious and is spreading from human to human. However, at this time, it is not known how easily the virus spreads between people.

What are the signs and symptoms of swine flu in people?
The symptoms of swine flu in people are similar to the symptoms of regular human flu and include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people have reported diarrhea and vomiting associated with swine flu. In the past, severe illness (pneumonia and respiratory failure) and deaths have been reported with swine flu infection in people. Like seasonal flu, swine flu may cause a worsening of underlying chronic medical conditions.

How serious is swine flu infection?
Like seasonal flu, swine flu in humans can vary in severity from mild to severe. Between 2005 until January 2009, 12 human cases of swine flu were detected in the U.S. with no deaths occurring. However, swine flu infection can be serious. In September 1988, a previously healthy 32-year-old pregnant woman in Wisconsin was hospitalized for pneumonia after being infected with swine flu and died 8 days later. A swine flu outbreak in Fort Dix, New Jersey occurred in 1976 that caused more than 200 cases with serious illness in several people and one death.

How do you catch swine flu?
Spread of swine flu can occur in two ways:

- Through contact with infected pigs or environments contaminated with swine flu viruses.
- Through contact with a person with swine flu. Human-to-human spread of swine flu has been documented also and is thought to occur in the same way as seasonal flu. Influenza is thought to spread mainly person-to-person through coughing or sneezing of infected people.
Are there medicines to treat swine flu?
Yes. CDC recommends the use of oseltamivir (Tamiflu) or zanamivir (Relenza) for the treatment and/or prevention of infection with these swine influenza viruses. Antiviral drugs are prescription medicines (pills, liquid or an inhaler) that fight against the flu by keeping flu viruses from reproducing in your body. If you get sick, antiviral drugs can make your illness milder and make you feel better faster. They may also prevent serious flu complications. For treatment, antiviral drugs work best if started soon after getting sick (within 2 days of symptoms).

How long can an infected person spread swine flu to others?
People with swine influenza virus infection should be considered potentially contagious as long as they are symptomatic and possible for up to 7 days following illness onset. Children, especially younger children, might potentially be contagious for longer periods.

What can I do to protect myself from getting sick?
There is no vaccine available right now to protect against swine flu. There are everyday actions that can help prevent the spread of germs that cause respiratory illnesses like influenza. Take these everyday steps to protect your health:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- If you get sick with influenza, CDC recommends that you stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them. Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.

What should I do if I get sick?
If you become ill with influenza-like symptoms, including fever, body aches, runny nose, sore throat, nausea, or vomiting or diarrhea, you may want to contact your health care provider, particularly if you are worried about your symptoms. Your health care provider will determine whether influenza testing or treatment is needed.

If you are sick, you should stay home and avoid contact with other people as much as possible to keep from spreading your illness to others.

If you become ill and experience any of the following warning signs, seek emergency medical care.

In children emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Not waking up or not interacting
- Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough
- Fever with a rash
In adults, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting

**Can I get swine influenza from eating or preparing pork?**

No. Swine influenza viruses are not spread by food. You cannot get swine influenza from eating pork or pork products. Eating properly handled and cooked pork products is safe.

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