

## Swine Flu – Questions and Answers

### 1 What are the symptoms of Swine Flu?

The typical symptoms are:

- sudden fever (a high body temperature of over 38C or 100.4F), and
- sudden cough.

Other symptoms may include:

- headache,
- tiredness,
- chills,
- aching muscles,
- limb or joint pain,
- diarrhoea or stomach upset,
- sore throat,
- runny nose,
- sneezing, and
- loss of appetite.

### 2 If I do have flu-like symptoms, what should I do?

The National Pandemic Flu Service is a new dedicated website ([www.direct.gov.uk/pandemicflu](http://www.direct.gov.uk/pandemicflu)) and phonenumber (0800 1 513 100 or 0800 1 513 200 (Textphone)) for people to check their symptoms and get a Unique Reference Number, which will give them access to antivirals if necessary.

People who have Swine Flu symptoms will be given a Unique Reference Number and told where their nearest antiviral collection point is. They should then ask a "Flu Friend" – a friend or relative who doesn't have Swine Flu – to go and pick up their antivirals.

The "Flu Friend" must show their own ID as well as that of the patient. The Unique Reference Number and ID information will be checked to ensure it matches the information provided when the assessment of symptoms was completed.

ID should be one of the following:

- Full driving licence
- Paid utility bill not less than 6 months old
- Building society/national savings
- Cheque guarantee/debit card
- Cheque book
- Credit card statement not less than 6 months old
- Council tax payment book
- Birth or marriage certificate

- Passport/European ID card
- Military ID
- Trade union card
- A standard acknowledgement letter (SAL) issued by the home office for asylum seekers
- Child benefit letter
- Parent held record (red book)
- NHS card
- Healthcare professionals registration number and ID card
- Pension/benefit book
- Store charge card (not loyalty card)

### **3 What is a 'Flu Friend and do I need one?**

You need to be identifying your 'Flu Friends' now.

'Flu Friends' can be relatives, neighbours and friends who will collect medicines, food and other supplies for you if you get Swine Flu, so that you don't have to leave home. It is a good idea to identify several 'Flu Friends' just in case one of them has Swine Flu when needed, but having at least one is very important.

### **4 Should people call 999, visit the walk in centre or A&E if they think they have Swine Flu?**

If you need to visit A&E for serious health problems and have symptoms of swine flu you will be assessed and treated. National guidance to anyone suffering only swine flu symptoms is to not attend A&E, call 999 or visit the walk in centre for treatment of those symptoms and to contact the National Pandemic Line at [www.direct.gov.uk/pandemicflu](http://www.direct.gov.uk/pandemicflu) or 0800 1 513 100 or 0800 1 513 200 (Textphone).

People who have Swine Flu symptoms will be given a Unique Reference Number and told where their nearest Antiviral Collection Point is. They should then ask a "Flu Friend" – a friend or relative who doesn't have swine flu – to go and pick up their antivirals.

The "Flu Friend" must show their own ID as well as that of the patient. The Unique Reference Number and ID information will be checked to ensure it matches the information provided when the assessment of symptoms was completed. See ID needed as above under question 2.

Only call 999 in an emergency.

## **5 Will I have to wait at an Antiviral Collection Point?**

Every effort will be made to issue the antiviral medication as quickly as possible, depending on the numbers attending, and whether or not they have all the right ID etc with them. 'Flu Friends' may have to wait.

## **6 Will there be a vaccine available against swine flu, and will everyone get one?**

Scientists are making good progress in developing a new vaccine for swine flu and we are expecting the first batches of vaccines in the autumn. Further stocks will arrive in the autumn, but it may well be next year before we can vaccinate everyone.

The Government has ordered enough vaccines for the whole population, but to reduce the impact of Swine Flu, the NHS will focus on those at the greatest risk first

At the moment, those identified as potential priority groups are:

- Older people and those in clinical risk groups (e.g. pregnant women, people with diabetes and people with lung/heart/kidney disease), as the virus can be more serious in these groups
- Under-16s, as protecting children can slow the spread of the virus in the population.
- Frontline health and social care workers (to help ensure the NHS functions well)

However, the virus may affect people differently in the autumn/winter so the priority groups will not be able to be defined until nearer the time when the vaccine is available.

The government will still aim to achieve universal vaccination, but because the vaccine will have to be delivered over time, it is right that we start thinking now about groups to be prioritised.

## **7 Now that some people have died from Swine Flu, is the virus becoming more severe?**

No, most people who have contracted Swine Flu are still experiencing relatively mild symptoms.

All forms of influenza can sometimes affect people severely and very occasionally cause death. Swine Flu appears to be less severe than seasonal flu and most people who are severely affected have other complicating factors.

## **8 How is Swine Flu different from the normal flu that people get every year?**

Swine Flu is a different strain of flu compared to the normal seasonal flu. It is similar to a strain that circulated prior to 1958. Therefore older people may well be immune to it. Young people will not have immunity to this virus, it is tending to spread more quickly among the younger age groups.

As the symptoms of Swine Flu are remaining mild in the vast majority of cases, people may choose to treat it as they would any other time they have had flu with paracetamol, fluids and rest.

## **9 How do people get Swine Flu and what can they do to protect themselves?**

Swine Flu spreads in the same way as ordinary colds and flu. The virus is spread through the droplets that come out of your nose or mouth when you cough or sneeze.

If you cough or sneeze and you do not cover it, those droplets can spread about one metre (3ft). If anyone is very close to you they might breathe the droplets in.

If you cough or sneeze into your hand, those droplets and the virus within them are easily transferred to surfaces that you touch, such as door handles, hand rails, telephones and keyboards. If someone else touches these surfaces and their face, the virus can enter the body and become infected.

Preventing the spread of germs is the single most effective way to slow the spread of diseases such as Swine Flu. You should always 'Catch it, bin it, kill it!':

- ensure everyone washes their hands regularly with soap and water,
- clean surfaces regularly to get rid of germs,
- use tissues to cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze, and
- place used tissues in a bin as soon as possible.

## **10 Do I need a fitness to return to work certificate if I have had Swine Flu?**

No, as long as you are symptom free you can return back to work. Most people who have had this flu recover fully within a week, so they will not need a medical certificate from their doctor but can self certificate.

## **11 What is the advice for pregnant women?**

Pregnant women are advised to take the following steps to reduce the risk of infection and complications:

- observe good hand hygiene (frequent use of soap and water);

- wherever possible, avoid contact with someone who is known or suspected to have swine 'flu;
- if they have 'flu-like symptoms, to make early contact with their General Practitioner who may advise treatment with antiviral drugs.
- Some mothers-to-be may wish to continue their day-to-day activities but exercise their choice now, on a highly precautionary basis, to avoid large densely-populated gatherings where they have little control over personal contact.

## **12 What should I do if I'm going on holiday?**

Wherever you go on holiday, you should always take the same sensible precautions that you do when at home. Know where you can get medical advice if you or your family feel unwell and make sure you have over-the-counter medication for coughs and sneezes.

If you are going on holiday in England and become ill the National Pandemic Flu Service is a new dedicated website ([www.direct.gov.uk/pandemicflu](http://www.direct.gov.uk/pandemicflu)) and phoneline (0800 1 513 100 or 0800 1 513 200 (Textphone)) for people to check their symptoms and get a unique number, which will give them access to antivirals if necessary.

If you are travelling to Europe, make sure you have your free European Health Insurance Card (EHIC). This entitles you to any necessary medical treatment, including for Swine Flu, during a visit to another European Economic Area country. You can get an EHIC application form from the Post Office, by calling 0845 606 2030 or by applying online at [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

If you have swine flu, we recommend that you do not travel until after your symptoms have stopped.

Whenever you go abroad, always check the latest travel advice from the Foreign Office at: [www.fco.gov.uk](http://www.fco.gov.uk).

## **13 The Department of Health says a third of the population in the UK could have had the virus by the autumn. Is NHS Lincolnshire expecting this to be the case in Lincolnshire– and does it have a number of people it expects to contract it?**

We expect the pattern of spread to be similar to that of the rest of the UK. The Chief Medical Officer estimates that flu could affect up to a third of the population.

We are monitoring the numbers of people receiving antivirals locally and using the national planning assumptions as we keep our local plans under review.

