

Current Advice in Scotland

Background

The current situation on Swine Flu is that it is part of the normal seasonal flu and the Scottish Government and medical experts are treating it as such.

This moderate assessment reflects that:

- Most people recover from infection without the need for hospitalization or medical care.
- Overall, national levels of severe illness from influenza A (H1N1) appear similar to levels seen during local seasonal influenza periods, although higher levels of disease have

occurred in some local areas and institutions.

- Overall, hospitals and health care systems in Scotland are coping with the numbers of people seeking medical attention and care
- However, there are concerns about current patterns of serious cases and deaths that are occurring primarily among the younger age group including the previously healthy. Pregnant women, those with pre-existing medical conditions and all people in the 'at risk' groups are urged to be vaccinated.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is swine flu?

Swine flu is a highly contagious acute respiratory disease caused by the influenza A virus. There are many types, and the infection is constantly changing. It can be spread from person to person mainly through coughing and sneezing.

What are the implications for human health?

Generally clinical symptoms are similar to seasonal influenza but reported clinical presentation ranges broadly from asymptomatic infection to severe pneumonia which can be fatal. Mild cases may have escaped recognition, therefore the true extent of this disease is unknown as the picture unfolds everyday.

Is there a human vaccine to protect against swine influenza?

Yes, vaccines have been developed and the swine flu vaccine is now incorporated into the current seasonal vaccine. Scotland is operating a programme of immunisation, based on various criteria.

UNISON has urged all of its Health members to take up the vaccine, to protect themselves, their families, and patients.

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

- Try to avoid close contact with people who appear unwell and present with flu like symptoms e.g. high fever, cough and/or sore throat.
- Ensure good hygiene practices by frequently and thoroughly washing your hands with soap and water to avoid picking up and spreading the virus from surfaces. Anti bacterial soaps will help to reduce and kill germs
- Practice good health habits including adequate sleep, eating nutritious food, and keeping physically active.

If there is an ill person at home:

- Try to cover your mouth and nose when caring for them.
- Wash your hands thoroughly after each contact with them.
- Try to improve the air flow in the area where the ill person stays. Open doors and windows to provide breezes.
- Keep the environment clean.

Ensure that you are up to date with what national and local health authorities are advising. (See links below)

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What should I do if I think I have swine flu or I have been exposed to someone with swine flu?

- Monitor your health closely for seven days after your visit or contact. You do not need to isolate yourself from other people as long as you remain well.
- If you develop flu-like symptoms stay at home and **phone your GP or NHS 24 on 0845 4 242424**.
- If a health professional decides that you need to have tests, avoid contact with other people as much as possible until you receive the results.
- Stay at home and keep away from work or crowds.
- Rest and take plenty of fluids.
- Cover your mouth and nose with tissues when coughing and sneezing; dispose of the used tissues properly then wash your hands thoroughly.
- Inform family and friends about your illness and seek help for household chores that require contact with other people such as shopping.
- Do not return to work until advised by your GP

How is the virus spread?

The virus is contained in the millions of tiny droplets that come out of the nose and mouth when someone coughs or sneezes. These droplets typically spread

about one meter (3ft). They hang suspended in the air for a while, but then land on surfaces, where the virus can survive for up to 24 hours.

Anyone who touches these surfaces can spread the virus on further by touching anything else.

How long does the virus live on surfaces?

The flu virus can live on a hard surface for up to 24 hours and a soft surface for around 20 minutes.

What is the incubation period for swine flu?

According to the Health Protection Agency, the incubation period for swine flu (the time between infection and appearance of symptoms) can be up to seven days, but probably between two and five days.

When are people most infectious?

People are most infectious soon after they develop symptoms. They can continue to spread the virus (for example, in coughs and sneezes) for up to five days (seven days in children). People become less infectious as their symptoms subside, and once their symptoms are gone they are no longer considered infectious to others.

What can Employers and Branches do?

- Ensure that a programme of good hygiene is observed throughout the workplace.
- Encourage workers to stay at home if they develop symptoms. This also applies to those attending educational and similar establishments e.g. children / students and delegates attending meetings and conferences.

- Employers should establish action plans and be ready to develop and implement a more detailed plan if necessary.
 - The plan must be robust and developed in consultation with safety representatives.
 - Where employees are engaging with the general public extra protection may be necessary.
 - Ensure that up to date information regarding the current situation is provided to staff at all times.
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For Further Information:

<http://www.nhs24.com/content>

<http://www.nhsinform.co.uk/health-zones/flu>

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/News/Releases/2011/01/06112217>