



## What you need to know about...

# Swine Flu 2009: Workplace Precautions

Help protect the most valuable assets in your workplace from swine flu—you and your colleagues. As the number of swine flu cases rises, please practice preventive hygiene habits in the workplace and at home. And stay informed. Inaccurate information can lead to unnecessary worry and poor decision-making.

### The Basics

Swine flu is a respiratory virus that commonly occurs in pigs. In late April 2009, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) determined the swine flu virus (H1N1) had become contagious and was capable of human transmission. The virus is regarded as having pandemic (an epidemic affecting a large portion of the population) potential, but it has not yet been declared a pandemic. CDC has confirmed at least one death from swine flu in the US.

### Who is at risk?

We all face some risk of developing swine flu—not just younger and older populations. People with chronic respiratory illnesses (asthma, COPD) or with compromised immune systems (i.e. people receiving chemotherapy) are advised to pay particular attention to swine flu prevention, and to act promptly in the event they develop symptoms of swine flu.

### What are the symptoms of swine flu?

The symptoms of swine flu are the same as seasonal flu: (1) fever, (2) cough, (3) sore throat, (4) body aches, (5) headache, (6) chills and (7) fatigue. Some people have reported diarrhea and vomiting associated with swine flu.

### How does swine flu spread?

Like other flu viruses, swine flu spreads mainly through coughing or sneezing by people who are infected, or by touching your mouth, eyes, or nose after contact with a contaminated object (viruses can live for up to two hours on telephone receivers).

### How can you protect yourself and your family?

Since no vaccine currently exists, the best protection is good hygiene: (1) “Cover” your coughs and sneezes (cough into the bend of your arm, away from others); (2) wash your hands frequently (with soap—15-20 seconds); (3) avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth (frequent virus entry points); (4) place alcohol-based hand sanitizer gel in gathering areas, such as reception desks, waiting areas, conference rooms, etc. (rub your hands together until the gel has dried); (5) use hand sanitizers during meetings after people shake hands or consider suspending hand-shaking altogether; and (6) place containers of disinfecting wipes near telephones shared by more than one person. **Please share these messages at home, too. Many of the early cases of swine flu in the US have occurred among teens.**

### How can I keep the virus from spreading?

If you have flu symptoms please stay home and contact your healthcare provider. Do not send your children to school if they display any flu symptoms. If a household member shows flu symptoms, non-infected family members may consider using N95 disposable respirator masks (available commercially) in the home.

### Are there drugs to treat swine flu?

Two anti-viral drugs, Tamiflu © and Relenza © have shown some effectiveness in treating people with swine flu. People who have symptoms of swine flu are encouraged to discuss with their healthcare providers whether antiviral medications are recommended for their treatment.

**For more information** visit Respiratory Health Association of Metropolitan Chicago's website at [www.lungchicago.org](http://www.lungchicago.org).