

# Swine flu

## Overview

### Introduction

Swine influenza is a disease in pigs. The virus currently transmitting among people is now generally referred to as swine flu, although the origin of the disease is still under investigation. There is no evidence of this strain of the disease circulating in pigs in the UK.

Swine influenza does not normally infect humans, although this occasionally does occur - usually in people who have had close contact with pigs.

Swine influenza viruses are usually of the H1N1 subtype. The current swine flu that has spread to humans is a version of this virus. The virus has been spread by person-to-person contact (see [Causes](#)).

### What is the current situation?

The outbreak of swine flu has now become a pandemic, which means it has spread globally. The virus has spread quickly because it is a new type of virus that few, if any, people have resistance to.

Human infection with swine flu (H1N1) viruses has been confirmed in Mexico, the US, Canada, the UK, and many other countries.

A flu pandemic is a natural event that occurs from time to time. Last century, there were flu pandemics in 1918, 1957 and 1968, when millions of people died across the world.

These pages aim to inform you about the current swine flu pandemic and advise on the important measures you should take.

### How is swine flu different from seasonal flu or bird flu?

Seasonal flu, caused by an existing flu virus, is a common infection in the UK that usually occurs during a two-month period in winter. For most people, it is an unpleasant but not life-threatening infection. People who are more at risk from it, such as older people, can be given a vaccine each year (see [Useful links](#), right).

Bird flu, also known as avian flu, is influenza that, as its name suggests, is usually confined to birds. However, like swine flu, it can also sometimes be caught by people and by pigs.

It is possible that the current swine flu pandemic will cause more illness and many more deaths than ordinary flu.

### What can we do?

The single most effective way to stop or slow the spread of diseases such as swine flu is to prevent the spread of germs. Wash your hands regularly with soap and water, or an antibacterial hand gel if you are out and about, and cover your mouth with a tissue if you cough or sneeze, disposing of the

tissue immediately (see [Prevention](#) for more detailed information).

You should also think about what you would do if you and your family all became ill. Who could you rely on for support, such as to collect medicines or shop for you?

## What is the government doing to tackle the pandemic?

GPs and hospitals across the UK are well prepared to deal with the pandemic, and antiviral medicine is being used to treat people who become ill (see [Treatment](#)).

A viral strain which can be used to make a vaccine against swine flu has now been produced by UK scientists. The UK has agreements with manufacturers to produce a vaccine over the following months.

**For more specific advice regarding pregnancy, babies and children and people with long-term conditions, go to the [Q&A page](#)**

### Epidemic

An epidemic is a sudden outbreak of disease that spreads through a population in a short amount of time.



# Important information about swine flu

## If you feel unwell ...

If you have flu-like symptoms and have recently returned from Mexico or another affected country, or if you are concerned because you think you have been in contact with someone who may have swine flu, stay at home and contact either your GP or NHS Direct on 0845 4647.

Before you call, [check your symptoms with this tool](#) (links to external site)

## Causes

### How flu can become a pandemic

Flu viruses are always changing, and new strains emerge every year. The current swine flu virus is one of these.

If a flu virus appears that is very different from the others, most people will not have immunity to it, and it may spread quickly and become a pandemic.

Concerns have recently increased due to the spread of swine flu around the world, which has now

become a pandemic.

## How the flu virus spreads

The swine flu virus is spread in exactly the same way as ordinary colds and flu.

A flu virus is made up of tiny particles that can be spread through the droplets that come out of the nose and mouth when someone coughs or sneezes.

If someone coughs or sneezes and they do not cover it, those droplets can spread about one metre (3ft). If you are very close to the person you might breathe them in.

Or, if someone coughs or sneezes into their hand, those droplets and the virus within them are easily transferred to surfaces that the person touches.

Everyday items at home and in public places may have traces of the virus, such as door handles, the TV remote control, hand rails and computer keyboards. Viruses can survive for several hours on these surfaces.

If you touch these surfaces and touch your face, the virus can enter your system, and you can become infected.

Go to the [Symptoms](#) page for information on the symptoms of swine flu.

## Why it can spread quickly

Evidence from previous pandemics suggests that one person will infect about two others, and that influenza spreads particularly rapidly in closed communities such as schools or residential homes.

People are most infectious soon after they develop symptoms, although they can spread the virus for up to five days after the start of symptoms (for children this is seven days).

# Symptoms

## Symptoms

The symptoms of swine flu are broadly the same as those of ordinary flu, but may be more severe and cause more serious complications.

The typical symptoms are:

- sudden fever, 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.

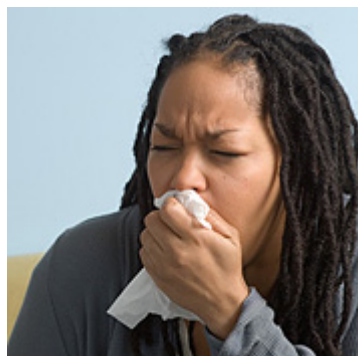
Potentially everyone is at risk from swine flu because few people, if any at all, have immunity (resistance) to it.

Go to the [Treatment](#) page for information on the treatment of swine flu.

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# Treatment

## Treating swine flu

The World Health Organization has rated the UK as one of the best-prepared countries for a swine flu pandemic.

Stocks of antiviral medicines and antibiotics are available to treat anyone who becomes ill during the current pandemic.

## Antivirals

One of the ways to lessen the symptoms of pandemic flu is to treat infected people with antiviral medicines, which have been used against the current swine flu. They are not a cure, but will help to:

- reduce the length of time you are ill by around one day,
- relieve some of the symptoms, and
- reduce the potential for serious complications such as pneumonia.

Antiviral drugs are currently also being given to close contacts of confirmed cases of swine flu, as a precautionary measure (see [Will antivirals be given to people without flu symptoms?](#)).

The UK has stocks of oseltamavir (Tamiflu) and zanamivir (Relenza) and there is currently enough to treat half the population should they become ill during the pandemic. Also, orders of Tamiflu have been placed to increase UK supplies to 50m doses, enough to treat 80% of the population.

If antivirals are required, the GP will contact the local health protection unit, which is coordinating the distribution of antivirals.

## Antibiotics

Antibiotics will also play an important part in the response to the pandemic. They will be used to treat people in the community if they develop bacterial infections in the lungs, like pneumonia.

In hospitals, antibiotics will be used to treat the sickest patients and may reduce the length of hospitalisation.

For more information, see [What extra antibiotics have been purchased?](#)

## Swine flu advice

For more specific advice regarding pregnancy, babies and children, older people and people with long-term conditions, go to the [Q&A page](#)

## Swine flu medicines

To learn about the medicines used to treat pandemic flu, including the benefits and side-effects, go to the [pandemic flu medicine guide](#)



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## Prevention

### Combating swine flu

Preventing the spread of germs is the single most effective way to slow the spread of diseases like swine flu.

You can protect yourself and your family by:

- ensuring everyone washes their hands regularly with soap and water, and
- cleaning surfaces regularly.

You can prevent a virus spreading to others by:

- always carrying tissues,
- using tissues to cover your mouth and nose when you cough and sneeze,
- binning the tissues as soon as possible, and
- washing your hands regularly.

CATCH IT. BIN IT. KILL IT. is a simple way to remember this.

For specific advice for carers, go to [Advice for carers](#)



## Advice for carers

### Swine flu advice for carers

Now there is a flu pandemic, you or the person you care for may get flu.

You may be managing to care for someone on your own, but if their needs increase because of flu, or if you get flu yourself, you may not be able to cope. People with underlying health conditions and older people are generally more likely to develop complications from flu, although it is not yet clear whether the same groups would be vulnerable to swine flu or another type of pandemic flu.

If you employ someone else to help you with your caring tasks, or so you can have a break, that person may also be affected by flu.

Other relatives or friends may also get flu, and may not be able to help you. You may even feel you need look after them while they are ill.

It is very important that you prepare in advance for these possibilities.

If you provide a regular and substantial amount of care or support for someone, talk to your local authority about having a carer's assessment. This will identify your needs as a carer and is an opportunity to talk about planning for emergency situations.

If you or the person you care for have already had an assessment and are eligible for local authority

support, you may have chosen to receive a Direct Payment or Individual Budget to buy the services you need yourself. It is important that your care plan includes arrangements for emergency care.

Your local authority may be able to provide emergency respite care for the person you look after until you are well again, but you should discuss with them how and when this would happen. During a flu pandemic, emergency respite care will probably be more difficult to organise.

A flu pandemic means that hospitals have to deal with more patients than usual, so people who under normal circumstances would be cared for in hospital will have to be looked after at home.

As part of your preparations think about:

- what if you get flu?
- what if the person you care for gets flu?
- what if your regular home help, nurse or other carer cannot come to work?
- what if a day centre closes?

Ask your local authority if there are any aids or equipment they can provide or that you can buy to help you manage more easily with your caring role.

## More information

[Help with emergency planning](#)

[Home help](#)

[Care homes](#)

[Aids and equipment](#)

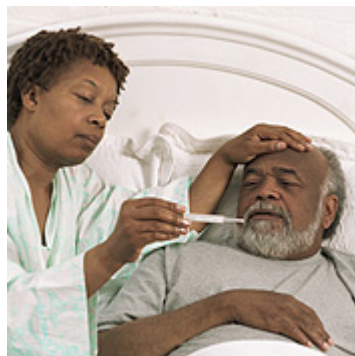
[Assessments](#)

[Carers' assessments](#)

[Your own wellbeing](#)

[Accessing respite care](#)

[Flu jabs for carers](#)



## Q&A

[Swine flu Q&A](#)

### About swine flu

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[Is the new swine flu virus contagious?](#)

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Should we expect a more severe second wave of the pandemic in the winter?

Should I try and catch swine flu now, so I will be immune to more serious strains that may emerge later?

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Does Tamiflu go out of date?

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If other countries are also being given advance supply guarantees, will we get ours first?

Does the current seasonal flu vaccine work?

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Will the vaccine still provide people with protection if the virus mutates between now and the autumn?

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Should I stop breastfeeding if I need to take antiviral drugs?

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Can babies under the age of one take antivirals?

## **People with long-term conditions**

I'm on immunosuppressants. Am I more at risk from swine flu?

Will my dose of immunosuppressants be altered in the event of an outbreak?

Can I take antivirals if I'm on immunosuppressants?

Am I more at risk of catching swine flu if I have HIV?

Am I more likely to suffer complications if I have HIV and catch swine flu?

Can I take antivirals if I have mild to moderate kidney disease?

Can I take antivirals if I have severe kidney disease?

Will people with long-term conditions get preference for a swine flu vaccine?

Are people with asthma or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) more at risk from swine flu?

What advice is there for people with asthma or COPD?

Can I take antivirals if I have asthma or COPD?

I have diabetes. Am I at more at risk from swine flu?

What should I do if my blood glucose increases?

Is there any advice for people with liver disease?

Can I take antivirals if I am on epilepsy treatment?

I look after someone who is very ill/disabled. What if I become too ill to care for them?

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Are older people more likely to catch swine flu?

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## **Schools**

At what point will a school close?

Why are schools closed for seven days?

Why is it necessary to close the whole school?

## **General questions**

What is the definition of WHO Phase 6?

How will the containment response change, now there is a pandemic?

How will use of antiviral prophylaxis become more targeted?

I am about to go on holiday to a country affected by swine flu - what should I do?

What should I do if I become ill on holiday or on the flight home?

Is it a mild infection and therefore no cause for concern?

Will hospital capacity be adequate?

Is it safe to eat pig meat?

## **What is swine flu?**

Swine influenza is a disease in pigs. The virus currently transmitting among people is now generally referred to as swine flu, although the origin of the disease is still under investigation. There is no evidence of this strain of the disease circulating in pigs in the UK.

There are regular outbreaks of swine influenza in pigs worldwide. It does not normally infect humans, although this occasionally does occur - usually in people who have had close contact with pigs.

Swine influenza viruses are usually of the H1N1 subtype. The swine flu that has spread to humans is a version of this virus.

### **Is the new swine flu virus contagious?**

The Health Protection Agency (HPA) says the new swine flu virus is highly contagious and is spreading from person to person.

Swine flu spreads in the same way as ordinary colds and flu. The virus is spread through the droplets that come out of the nose or mouth when someone coughs or sneezes.

If someone coughs or sneezes and they do not cover it, those droplets can spread about one metre (3ft). If you are very close to the person you might breathe them in.

Or, if someone coughs or sneezes into their hand, those droplets and the virus within them are easily transferred to surfaces that the person touches, such as door handles, hand rails, telephones and keyboards. If you touch these surfaces and touch your face, the virus can enter your system, and you can become infected.

[See Causes for more information](#)

### **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.

### **How quickly is swine flu spreading?**

After infection, it takes less than two days for symptoms to start, at which point people are most infectious.

Evidence from previous pandemics suggests that one person will infect about two others, and that influenza spreads particularly rapidly in closed communities such as schools or residential homes.

Go to the [Latest on swine flu](#) for a current list of all the countries affected by swine flu.

### **How dangerous is it?**

It is difficult to judge this at the moment. While there have been deaths in Mexico and a small number outside of Mexico, symptoms exhibited by most infected people have not been severe.

It appears that early doses of antiviral medicines such as Tamiflu are effective in helping people to recover. In the UK we have enough antivirals to treat half the population if they were to become ill. Also, orders of Tamiflu have been placed to increase UK supplies to 50m doses, enough to treat 80% of the population.

### **What are the symptoms of swine flu?**

The symptoms of swine flu in people are similar to the symptoms of human seasonal flu and include fever, fatigue, lack of appetite, coughing and sore throat (see [Symptoms](#)). Some people with swine flu have also reported vomiting, diarrhoea and aches and pains in their limbs.

## **How long are symptoms expected to last?**

As with any sort of influenza, the severity and duration of symptoms will vary depending on treatment and individual circumstances. Most cases reported in the UK to date have been relatively mild, with those affected starting to recover within a week.

## **I was on a flight where someone may have had swine flu - am I at risk?**

Close contact with an infected person increases the risk of catching swine flu. Close contact is defined as being exposed to a probable or confirmed case within the previous seven days for longer than an hour, and within a distance of one metre or less.

## **How does swine flu cause death?**

Like any other type of flu, people can die from swine flu if they develop complications, like pneumonia.

## **Why is the death rate higher in Mexico than other countries?**

This is not yet understood and there could be a variety of explanations. It may be that people affected in Mexico may have sought treatment at a much later stage than those in other countries.

## **Will the swine flu virus become resistant to antivirals?**

It is possible. The virus may mutate (change) and become less susceptible or resistant to the antiviral drug. If the virus does develop resistance, it's more likely to be to Tamiflu, the main antiviral treatment. If this happens, the government has a stockpile of Relenza that could be used instead.

## **Should we expect a more severe second wave of the pandemic in the winter?**

It is possible that the current viral strain will become more widespread in the winter or will mutate to cause increased infection, although these risks cannot be directly quantified. The government continues in its 'hope for the best, plan for the worst' approach, which has acknowledged the possibility of a more severe wave in the winter from the first outbreak of swine flu.

## **Should I try and catch swine flu now, so I will be immune to more serious strains that may emerge later?**

No – it is irresponsible to purposefully catch the virus as you may perpetuate the spread. We don't yet know the profile of the virus and are closely monitoring each case that comes up.

## **What can I do?**

You can reduce, but not eliminate, the risk of catching or spreading swine flu by:

- Always covering your nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing.
- Disposing of dirty tissues promptly and carefully.
- Maintaining good basic hygiene, for example washing hands frequently with soap and warm water to reduce the spread of the virus from your hands to face, or to other people.
- Cleaning hard surfaces, such as door handles, frequently using a normal cleaning product.

[See Prevention](#)

You should also prepare now by:

- **Confirming a network of 'flu friends'** – friends and relatives – who could help you if you fall ill. They could collect medicines and other supplies for you so you do not have to leave home and possibly spread the virus.
- **Knowing your NHS number and those of other family members** and keeping them in a safe place. It is not essential to have your NHS number in order to receive treatment, but it can help NHS staff to find your health records. You will be able to find your NHS Number on your medical card or other items such as prescribed medication, GP letter or hospital appointment card/letter.
- **Making sure you have adequate quantities of cold and cough remedies** in your medicine cupboard in case you or your family are affected by swine flu.

### **Who should be wearing a facemask?**

The Health Protection Agency (HPA) recommends that healthcare workers should wear a facemask if they come into close contact with a person with symptoms (within one metre) to reduce their risk of catching the virus from patients.

However, the HPA does not recommend that healthy people wear facemasks to go about their everyday business.

### **Why shouldn't the general public wear facemasks?**

Because there's no conclusive evidence that facemasks will protect healthy people in their day-to-day lives.

The virus is spread by picking up the virus from touching infected surfaces, or by someone coughing or sneezing at very close range – so unless you are standing close to someone with the virus, wearing a facemask will not make a difference.

There are concerns about the risks posed by not using facemasks correctly.

Facemasks must be changed regularly as they are less effective when dampened by a person's breath. People may infect themselves if they touch the outer surface of their mask, or may infect others by not disposing of old masks safely.

Finally, wearing a facemask may encourage complacency. People need to focus on good hand hygiene, staying at home if they are feeling unwell, and covering their mouth when they cough or sneeze.

### **So why have other countries gone down this route?**

This is an issue which each government has considered separately. France is encouraging the general public to buy their own masks for use as a precaution, but it is not stockpiling masks centrally from government funds and neither is the US.

In other countries there is an existing culture of wearing facemasks for either the prevention of spreading illness or preventing the risks of pollution; this is not the case in the UK.

### **What should I do if I think I'm infected?**

If you have flu-like symptoms and have recently returned from Mexico or another affected country, or if you are concerned because you think you have been in contact with someone who may have swine flu:

- Stay at home.
- [Check your symptoms](#) if possible (links to external site)
- Call the Swine Flu Information Line on 0800 1 513 513 to hear the latest advice

If you are still concerned, call your GP or NHS Direct on 0845 4647.

Do not go into your GP surgery, or to a hospital, as you may spread the disease to others. Ask your flu friend to go out for you.

### **If I have been in close contact with an infected person, do I need treatment?**

Individuals who have been in close contact with someone who is confirmed to have swine flu are currently being offered antiviral medicines as a precautionary measure. Close contact is defined as being exposed to a probable or confirmed case within the previous seven days for longer than an hour, and within a distance of one metre. You do not need to worry unless you have been in close contact with someone who has been specifically confirmed to have swine flu.

### **Is swine flu treatable?**

Testing has shown that the swine flu can be treated with the antiviral medicines oseltamavir (brand name Tamiflu) and zanamivir (Relenza). However, the drugs must be administered at an early stage to be effective.

See [Treatment](#) for more information

The UK already has a stockpile of antivirals sufficient to treat half the population. Also, orders of Tamiflu have been placed to increase UK supplies to 50m doses, enough to treat 80% of the population.

### **What do antivirals do?**

Antivirals are not a cure, but they help you to recover by:

- relieving some of the symptoms,
- reducing the length of time you are ill by around one day, and
- reducing the potential for serious complications, such as pneumonia.

### **How large is the UK's stockpile of antivirals?**

The government has 23 million treatments of Tamiflu and 10.5 million treatments of Relenza. Orders of Tamiflu have been placed to increase UK supplies to 50m doses, enough to treat 80% of the population.

### **Is one of the antivirals more appropriate for pregnant women and people with certain kidney conditions?**

Relenza is an inhaled drug that will be used for pregnant women and people with certain kidney conditions who are unable to take Tamiflu. See more on pregnancy below.

### **Will antivirals be given to people without flu symptoms?**

The government is currently giving antivirals to the close contacts of the confirmed cases. The government will keep this under review as the situation develops.

The definition of close contacts is based on Health Protection Agency guidance, which states that individuals exposed to a probable or confirmed case within a distance of one metre or less and for longer than one hour should be offered antivirals as a precautionary measure.

### **Will my child experience nausea if they take Tamiflu?**

As is the case with many medicines, nausea is a known side effect of Tamiflu, in a small number of cases. Symptoms may lessen over the course of the treatment. It may help to take Tamiflu either with or immediately after food, and drinking some water may also lessen any feelings of nausea.

### **How will I gain access to antivirals?**

Arrangements are being put into place with local healthcare services for antivirals to be made available to those who need them.

People with symptoms and others at risk are currently being assessed by their GP. If antivirals are required, the GP will contact the local health protection unit, which is coordinating the distribution of antivirals.

If you have flu-like symptoms and are concerned, stay at home. You can check your symptoms on the [Flu symptom checker](#) (links to external site) or call the swine flu information line on 0800 1 513 513. If you have taken these steps and are still concerned, call your GP or NHS Direct on 0845 46 47. Do not travel out to your GP or hospital.

### **Should people be stockpiling their own antivirals?**

No. The government has a stockpile of antivirals sufficient to treat half the population, and is taking steps to increase this to cover 80% as an extra precaution. Therefore, antivirals should be available for everyone who gets ill in the pandemic and there is no need for people to buy their own.

### **Does Tamiflu go out of date?**

The government has a programme to replace any expired doses under a 'rolling stock' system.

### **Is there a vaccine?**

No, not at the moment. Influenza viruses change very quickly. For a vaccine to provide adequate protection it needs to be adapted to the particular strain in circulation.

Scientists are making good progress in developing a new vaccine for swine flu and the essential first step has been met. However, it could take months to develop and manufacture enough supplies to meet what could be huge demand. The UK has agreements with manufacturers who will produce a vaccine when it becomes available.

### **Why does it take several months to produce a swine flu vaccine?**

The flu vaccine production process is long and complicated. Production technology is labour-intensive. The government's plans include two manufacturers, thus maximising chances of early development.

### **If other countries are also being given advance supply guarantees, will we get ours first?**

The UK has a binding contractual agreement in place to ensure its supply.

### **Does the current seasonal flu vaccine work?**

The current seasonal flu vaccine is designed to protect against H1N1, but it is unclear as yet whether this will offer any protection against the current strain of swine flu.

### **How many stocks are available of seasonal vaccine?**

Flu vaccine is produced each year for the seasonal flu. Discussions are ongoing with manufacturers about how much may still be available. However, the government has determined that there are 430,000 doses of vaccine available in the UK.

### **Who will be a priority for vaccination with the H1N1 swine flu vaccine?**

The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation has previously advised that the priority groups in relation to H5N1 should be assumed to be:

- frontline health and social care workers (to help ensure the NHS functions well),
- older people and those in clinical risk groups, as flu can be more serious in these groups, and
- under-16s, as protecting children can slow the spread of the virus in the population.

The priority groups would be reviewed in light of evidence on the virulence and severity of the new virus in different groups.

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.

### **Will the vaccine still provide people with protection if the swine flu virus mutates between now and the autumn?**

At this stage, it is impossible to predict if or how the H1N1 swine flu virus will mutate (change). However, experiences with the H5N1 vaccine (bird flu vaccine) would suggest that an H1N1 vaccine (produced using the same processes) would also provide a high level of immunity against closely related strains. The level of cross-protection is expected to be greatest for more closely related strains.

### **Does the NHS have enough syringes to administer the swine flu vaccine?**

Yes, orders have been placed to ensure there are enough syringes to administer the vaccine.

### **What extra antibiotics have been purchased?**

Orders have been placed for 15.2m courses of antibiotics. They will play an important part in the response to a pandemic.

### **Why do you need antibiotics in a pandemic?**

While antivirals may reduce the number of complications, there are still likely to be significant numbers of complications occurring in the pandemic. Some of the most common include bacterial infections in the respiratory tract and lungs, such as pneumonia. Antibiotics are needed to treat such complications.



Antibiotics will be used to treat people in the community if they develop complications. In hospitals, antibiotics will be used to treat the sickest patients and may reduce the length of hospitalisation.

### **Does swine flu pose special risks in pregnant women?**

During pregnancy, you may have an increased risk of complications from any type of flu, especially in the second and third trimester.

### **Can I take antiviral drugs if I am pregnant?**

Yes, on the advice of a doctor. The Department of Health has purchased Relenza, an inhaled antiviral drug that treats flu without reaching the developing fetus.

An expert group reviewed the risk of antiviral treatment in pregnancy, which is extremely small - much smaller than the risk posed by the symptoms of swine flu.

### **Will pregnant women get preference for a swine flu vaccine?**

It will be months before a swine flu vaccine becomes available. When it is available, there will be guidelines on which groups of people are a greater priority for vaccination. See vaccine information above.

### **Should I stop breastfeeding if I need to take antiviral drugs?**

Women who are breastfeeding should continue to do so while receiving antiviral treatment, as this is not contraindicated. If a mother is ill, she should continue breastfeeding and increase feeding frequency. If she becomes too ill to feed, then expressing milk may still be possible. Antiviral drugs are excreted into breast milk in very small (insignificant) amounts.

### **Can children take antivirals?**

Yes, on the advice of a doctor. Tamiflu is safe for infants aged one and older, at a reduced dose. Relenza (an inhaler) can be used by children aged five and older under the supervision of an adult.

### **Can babies under the age of one take antivirals?**

Tamiflu and Relenza are not licensed for use in babies under the age of one. However, Tamiflu may be used under the supervision of a doctor if your baby is ill.

### **I'm on immunosuppressants. Am I more at risk from swine flu?**

Yes. If you take immunosuppressants you have a greater risk of becoming infected with any virus, including swine flu, and will be less able to fight it off once you have it.

### **Will my dose of immunosuppressants be altered in the event of an outbreak?**

Your doctor may advise that your dose of immunosuppressants needs to change. The appropriate dose will vary from patient to patient.

### **Can I take antivirals if I'm on immunosuppressants?**

Yes, on the advice of a doctor it is safe for you to take Tamiflu or Relenza.

### **Am I more at risk of catching swine flu if I have HIV?**

Probably not. Although HIV infects CD4 cells and reduces their number and function, there are other parts of the immune system that are able to fight flu. For more information, go to the [Terrence Higgins Trust website](#) (links to external site).

### **Am I more likely to suffer complications if I have HIV and catch swine flu?**

If you have a low CD4 count (under 200), you may be more likely to suffer complications like pneumonia from any type of flu, including swine flu.

### **Can I take antivirals if I have mild to moderate kidney disease?**

Yes. If you have stage 1 to 3 kidney disease, or your glomerular filtration rate (GFR) is above 30, you will be treated as any other person would be. This means you can take Relenza or Tamiflu, if necessary.

### **Can I take antivirals if I have severe kidney disease?**

Yes. If you have stage 4 or 5 kidney disease, or your glomerular filtration rate (GFR) is below 30, you will probably be under the care of a kidney specialist. Relenza (an inhaler) is safe to take. If you find this tricky to use, your doctor may give you a reduced dose of Tamiflu tablets instead.

### **Will people with long-term conditions get preference for a swine flu vaccine?**

It will be months before a swine flu vaccine becomes available. When it is available, there will be guidelines on which groups of people are a greater priority for vaccination. See vaccine information above.

### **Are people with asthma or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) more at risk from swine flu?**

You are no more likely to catch swine flu than anyone else. However, if you do catch a respiratory infection, including swine flu, it may add to the breathing difficulties you may have.

### **What advice is there for people with asthma or COPD?**

Your condition places you at greater risk if you catch the disease. It is therefore all the more important that you follow good hygiene practices (see '[What can I do](#)') and react quickly if you develop flu-like symptoms (see '[What should I do if I think I'm infected](#)').

### **Can I take antivirals if I have asthma or COPD?**

Yes - Tamiflu is safe to take. However, Relenza (an inhaler) is usually not given to people with asthma as on rare occasions it can cause breathing complications.

### **I have diabetes. Am I at more at risk from swine flu?**

You are no more likely to catch swine flu than anyone else. However, if you do catch it, your blood

glucose may increase and your diabetes treatment may need to be adjusted accordingly.

### **What should I do if my blood glucose increases?**

If you find your blood glucose has increased, or you develop thirst and are urinating more, call your GP. If you are on insulin and testing your own blood glucose, you may be advised to do this more often so you can adjust your dose according to the results. If you start to vomit or become increasingly unwell, call your GP as soon as possible.

### **Is there any advice for people with liver disease?**

If you have liver disease you are no more likely to catch swine flu than anyone else. If you do catch it, antivirals are safe to take – there is no interaction between these and antivirals you may already be taking to treat hepatitis.

### **Can I take antivirals if I am on epilepsy treatment?**

Yes. It is thought that antiviral treatments will not affect medicines taken to control epilepsy.

### **I look after someone who is very ill/disabled. What if I become too ill to care for them?**

As a carer, you should probably begin planning for an emergency caring situation as soon as possible. The best way to get help with planning for a caring emergency is to arrange a carer's assessment from your local authority.

If you have time you may be able to arrange for formal respite care, but you may want to talk to friends, neighbours and relatives about forming a network of 'flu friends' who can help out and look after you if you are ill.

For more information, go to the page on Advice for carers

### **Are older people more likely to catch swine flu?**

It is not yet known. Almost all of those infected with swine flu in Europe are people under 50 who have recently returned from travel in Mexico. This picture could change.

### **Are older people more at risk of complications if they do catch it?**

Older and frail people are more likely to develop complications from any type of flu, and are generally less able to fight it off.

### **At what point will a school close?**

If a case of swine flu is confirmed in a school, the Health Protection Agency will carry out an assessment to look at the risk of infection spreading, and consider whether to temporarily close the school (initially for seven days). The risk assessment will be tailored to the individual school's circumstances.

### **Why are schools closed for seven days?**

The Health Protection Agency has concluded that seven days is the maximum swine flu incubation period - the time between getting the virus and symptoms starting to appear. Schools can reopen

earlier than seven days if there is evidence that the suspected case is not swine flu.

### **Why is it necessary to close the whole school?**

Swine flu can spread rapidly in a school. When a risk assessment is carried out, each school is assessed individually and factors such as physical layout of classes, the extent to which classes and year groups intermingle and the type and duration of exposure to the virus are taken into consideration.

With pupil welfare in mind, the recent school closures have been a preventative measure to keep the swine flu from spreading.

### **What is the definition of WHO Phase 6?**

The technical definition of Phase 6 is human-to-human spread of the virus into at least two countries in one World Health Organisation region, with community level outbreaks in at least one other country in a different WHO region.

Because the virus has been spreading for some time in North America, the decision that 'community level outbreaks' were occurring in other regions means that the criteria for Phase 6 have been fulfilled.

### **How will the containment response change, now there is a pandemic?**

The government will apply changes in areas of the UK where they are deemed appropriate by public health assessments. The changes include:

- the use of clinical diagnosis rather than laboratory testing where there is a high probability that cases are positive,
- continued antiviral treatment of all those who have the virus but more targeted use of antiviral prophylaxis, and
- the restriction of contact follow-up to those most at risk.

### **How will use of antiviral prophylaxis become more targeted?**

The use of antiviral prophylaxis will be based on local risk assessment and limited to contacts considered most at risk of contracting the virus - in practice, that will be mainly household or household-like contacts, or in a school context, those at surrounding desks.

### **I am about to go on holiday to a country affected by swine flu - what should I do?**

Make sure you consult the overseas travel advice on the [Foreign & Commonwealth Office website](#) and take sensible precautions.

### **What should I do if I become ill on holiday or on the flight home?**

If you experience flu-like symptoms during a stay in a country affected by swine flu, contact a health professional and tell them your symptoms.

If you become ill on your flight home, alert the cabin crew to your symptoms. There are procedures in place for dealing with passengers who become unwell on flights, and the airline will advise port health officials on the ground that a passenger requires a health assessment and may need treatment.

To access the Department of Health Swine Flu Information line when abroad, call 00 44 207 928 1010.

### **Is it a mild infection and therefore no cause for concern?**

Don't be complacent, as it is too soon to assume it will be a mild infection. We don't know the profile of the virus and are closely monitoring each case that comes up. Everyone who has been infected with the virus in this country has so far been diagnosed early and treated with antivirals, which reduce the severity of symptoms.

The flu virus changes character very rapidly. It can pick up and swap genetic material, which can dramatically change its character, increasing the severity of symptoms. The virus could change in the autumn, so we need to plan for this.

### **Will hospital capacity be adequate?**

Most flu sufferers can be cared for appropriately at home. The UK has well developed plans in place for managing extra demand on the healthcare system during the pandemic - see guidelines on [Managing demand and capacity in healthcare organisations \(surge\)](#) for more information (links to external site).

### **Is it safe to eat pig meat?**

Yes. The WHO says there is no evidence that swine flu can be transmitted through eating meat from infected animals. However, it is essential to cook meat properly. A temperature of 70°C (158°F) would be sure to kill the virus. Pig meat includes pork, bacon, ham and pork products.



## Medicine Guides

### Medicines information

Learn about the medicines used to treat or manage this condition - preparations, benefits and side-effects are all covered.

The information is provided through a collaboration between NHS Choices, the medicines information provider Datapharm, and other health organisations. It's based on the best available clinical evidence, and is continually updated.

To take advantage of this unique resource go to:

[Medicine guides: Pandemic flu](#)



## Map of Medicine

### See what the doctor sees with Map of Medicine

The Map of Medicine is used by doctors throughout the NHS to determine the best treatment options for their patients. NHS Choices offers everyone in England exclusive and free access to this cutting-edge internet resource, which lets you see exactly what your doctor sees.

The information in the Map has been approved by the UK's leading clinical experts, is based on the best available clinical evidence, and is continually updated. To take advantage of this unique resource go to:

Map of Medicine: [influenza](#)



## Other languages/formats

### Swine flu information in other languages and formats

The links below provide information on swine flu in other languages. There are also English language audio and large print versions for those who require these formats.

### Languages

[Arabic](#)

[Bengali](#)

[Chinese: traditional](#)

[Farsi/Dari](#)

[French](#)

[Gujarati](#)

[Polish](#)

[Portuguese](#)

[Punjabi](#)

[Somali](#)

[Spanish](#)

[Tamil](#)

[Turkish](#)

[Urdu](#)

[Welsh](#)

### Other formats

[Large print](#)

[Audio](#)

[British Sign Language](#)

Easy read information

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## **NHS Choices puts you in control of your healthcare**

The NHS Choices has been developed to help you make choices about your health, from lifestyle decisions about things like smoking, drinking and exercise, through to the practical aspects of finding and using NHS services when you need them.

[www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)