DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
WASHINGTON HEADQUARTERS SERVICES
1155 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, DC 20301-1155

April 30, 2009

H1N1 Flu Outbreak Precautions to Assist in Maintaining Everyday Activities

Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website: http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/

What is swine flu?
Swine flu or influenza is a respiratory disease of pigs caused by type A influenza viruses that causes regular outbreaks in pigs. People do not normally get swine flu, but human infections (hereafter referred to as H1N1 flu) can and do happen. H1N1 flu viruses have been reported to spread from person-to-person, but in the past, this transmission was limited and not sustained beyond three people.

What are the signs and symptoms of H1N1 flu in people?
The symptoms of H1N1 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 H1N1 flu. In the past, severe illness (pneumonia and respiratory failure) and deaths have been reported with H1N1 flu infections in people. Like seasonal flu, H1N1 flu may cause a worsening of underlying chronic medical conditions.

How is the H1N1 flu virus spread?
Germs can be spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose, or mouth. Droplets from a cough or sneeze of an infected person move through the air. Germs can be spread when a person touches respiratory droplets from another person on a surface like a desk and then touches their own eyes, mouth or nose before washing their hands.

How long can someone with the H1N1 flu infect someone else?
Infected people may be able to infect others beginning 1 day before symptoms develop and up to 7 or more days after becoming sick. That means that you may be able to pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick.

How long can viruses live outside the body?
We know that some viruses and bacteria can live 2 hours or longer on surfaces like cafeteria tables, doorknobs, and desks. Frequent hand washing will help you reduce the chance of getting contamination from these common surfaces.

What is the best technique for washing my hands to avoid getting the flu?
Washing your hands often will help protect you from germs. Wash with soap and water, or clean with alcohol-based hand cleaner. We recommend that when you wash your hands -- with soap and warm water -- that you wash for 15 to 20 seconds. When soap and water are not available, alcohol-based disposable hand wipes or gel sanitizers may be used. You can find them in most supermarkets and drugstores. If using gel, rub your hands until the gel is dry. The gel does not need water to work; the alcohol in it kills the germs on your hands.

Practice healthy habits to help stop the spread of H1N1 flu:

- Try to stay in good general health. Get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids, and eat nutritious food.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water. This removes germs from your skin and helps prevent diseases from spreading.
- Use waterless alcohol-based hand gels (containing at least 60% alcohol) when soap is not available and hands are not visibly dirty.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, and put your used tissue in a wastebasket.
- If you do not have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve, not your hands.
- Wash your hands after coughing or sneezing, using soap and water or an alcohol-based hand cleaner (with at least 60% alcohol) when soap and water are not available.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth. Germs spread that way.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people. (Flu is thought to spread mainly person-to-person through coughing or sneezing of infected people).
- It is important to follow the advice of local health and government authorities. You may be asked to restrict your movement and stay in your home to contain the spread of H1N1 flu.

Can I get H1N1 influenza from eating or preparing pork?
No. H1N1 flu viruses are not spread by food. You cannot get H1N1 flu from eating pork or pork products. Eating properly handled and cooked pork products is safe.

Additional Related Information:

Viruses are short-lived when outside the host.
Because viruses only live for 2-4 hours outside the human body, offices are effectively decontaminated when they are unoccupied overnight.

Use regular soap.
Viruses are not bacteria, hence, antibacterial soaps will have no added benefit. Using normal or regular soap is adequate for all personal hygiene. See the question on hand washing technique on page one.

Maintain a copy of your Immunization Record.
While no vaccine currently exists for H1N1 flu, a copy of your "International Certificates of Vaccination as approved by the World Health Organization and the US Department of Health and Human Services," otherwise known as your "Immunization Record," will assist medical authorities in the management of disease outbreaks.

Traveling to Mexico:
Active Duty Service Members and DoD Civilian Employees traveling to Mexico on official orders should take special precautions. These personnel should walk-in and visit the DiLorenzo TRICARE Health Clinic to receive personal protective equipment (mask and hand sanitizer) and preventive medications. Please bring a copy of your travel orders.

WHS Safety and Environmental Management Branch:

For any questions regarding this topic at the Pentagon Reservation or at Leased Facilities, please call and ask for the Industrial Hygiene Program.
Phone: 703-693-3683 Fax: 703-614-9671