

Pandemic Risk Update

As at 28 April 2009



Swine Influenza

- What is the swine influenza?
- What are the symptoms?
- How is it spread?
- What medications are available?
- Which countries are affected?
- What is the current situation in Australia?
- How to stay up to date?
- How to reduce the risk of spreading the virus in the workplace?
- We have a pandemic plan. What should we do now?
- **We do not have a pandemic plan.** What should we do now?

What is the swine influenza?

Swine influenza (swine flu) is a respiratory disease affecting pigs caused by type A influenza. Outbreaks of swine flu are regular amongst pigs.

The risk of swine flu virus in humans is rare because it does not normally infect humans. However, human infections can occur - the virus which has infected people in Mexico, seems to be a hybrid form of human, bird and swine flu.

Like the seasonal flu, swine flu in humans can vary in severity from mild to severe to fatal.

Swine flu is supposedly related to the Spanish flu - an influenza pandemic that in 1918 spread to nearly every part of the world, affected up to one billion people (half the world's population at the time) and killed around 70 million people. Like the swine flu, most of the Spanish flu victims were healthy young adults, in contrast to most influenza outbreaks which predominantly affect juvenile, elderly, or otherwise weakened patients.

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms of swine flu in people are similar to the symptoms of regular human seasonal influenza and include fever, lethargy, body aches, headache, chills, lack of appetite and coughing.

Some people with the swine flu also report runny nose, sore throat, nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea.

How is it spread?

Human-to-human transmission of swine flu occurs in the same way as seasonal flu occurs in people, which is mainly person-to-person transmission through coughing or sneezing of people infected with the influenza virus.

People may also become infected by touching something with a flu virus on it and then touching their mouth or nose.

Infected people may be able to infect others from 1 day before symptoms develop and up to 7 or more days after becoming sick. This means that people can pass on the flu to other before they know they are sick.

Swine influenza viruses are not spread by food. Eating properly handled and cooked pork products is safe.

What medications are available?

The Australian seasonal influenza vaccine will not provide protection against this new strain of influenza virus.

In Australia, current information suggests that the antiviral drugs (Tamiflu and Relenza) are useful against the swine influenza virus. These drugs are readily available through pharmacists and can be prescribed by GPs.

Antiviral drugs are prescription medicines (pills, liquid or an inhaler) that fight against the flu by keeping flu viruses from reproducing in your body. If people are sick, antiviral drugs can make the illness milder and make them feel better faster. They may also prevent serious flu complications.

For treatment, antiviral drugs work best if started soon after getting sick (within 2 days of symptoms).

Which countries are affected?

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has confirmed the "pandemic potential".

The current WHO phase of the alert is **Phase 4** - this indicates a significant increase in risk of a pandemic but does not necessarily mean that a pandemic is a forgone conclusion. The next alert level, Phases 5-6 are Pandemic Phases.

Reported deaths (confirmed) as at 28 April 2009

- MEXICO - 152 (26)

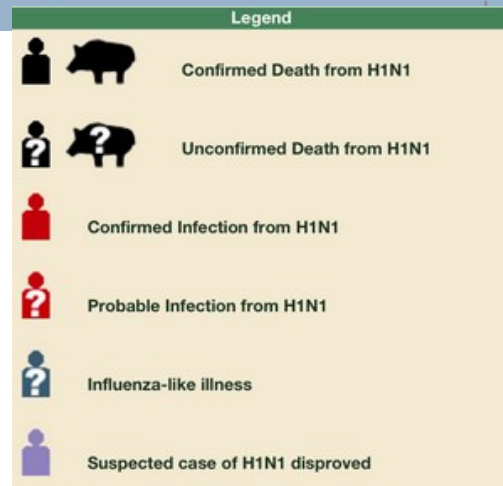
Major reported cases and (laboratory confirmed cases) at 28 April 2009:

- MEXICO - 1,995 (172)
- USA - 266 (50)
- CANADA - 28 (6)
- UK - 21 (2)
- SPAIN - 32 (2)
- NEW ZEALAND – 43 (3)
- AUSTRALIA - 40



H1N1 Swine flu in 2009 as at 28 April 2009. These numbers are constantly changing.

Source: [Google Map](#).



What is the current situation in Australia?

There are no 'confirmed' swine flu cases in Australia to date. The pandemic threat level is still '**MILD**' at this stage, but it is quickly evolving.

Virologist say the disease could be in Australia already and cases are expected.

If it's not here already, there is a risk it may arrive soon. A delegation of Australian politicians is currently in Mexico on trade talks.

Queensland is now 'officially' on pandemic alert. The two Queenslanders feared to have picked up swine flu have been given the all-clear. More cases are being investigated now.

Five people in NSW are now being tested for swine flu.

The key message from the Commonwealth Chief Medical Officer (CMO) is to "be alert, but not be alarmed".

The CMO has proposed tighter quarantine measures.

Medical staff are now on standby at all international airports.

Australia has thermal imaging technology that can detect high body temperatures (indicating risk of flu), but the technology has not been installed and activated yet.

Australian hospital emergency departments and GP's have been alerted.

Australia has a "surveillance system" in place.

Australia has a stock pile of 9 million doses of anti-viral medicines.

The Australian health department has been consulting with border agencies and reviewing their preparedness.

Airports are on official alert and are aware of the situation.

Airlines are now required to report passengers or crew with flu-like symptoms for all flights coming in from the Americas.

How to stay up to date?

The Australian Government, Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA), is responsible for managing an influenza pandemic in Australia. Their main strategy for a pandemic is to contain the virus in the first instance and thereafter, maintenance of critical infrastructure to support community services such as water, electricity, transport and communications.

Swine Influenza Hotline 180 2007

Department of Health and Ageing	www.health.gov.au
Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade	www.smartraveller.gov.au
World Health Organisation (WHO)	www.who.int
Avian Influenza resource	www.avianinfluenza.com.au
NSW State Health Department	www.health.nsw.gov.au
Centres for Disease Control	www.cdc.gov

How to reduce the risk of spreading the virus in the workplace?

It is important that employers start to communicate some simple practices to all staff to help reduce the risk of catching and spreading the swine flu. The messages communicated and actions implemented should be appropriate to the severity of the risk and phase/pandemic level declared at the time. Strategies could include:

- Staying in good general health.
- Getting plenty of sleep, more physical activity, managing stress, drinking plenty of fluids and eating nutritious food. Vitamin supplements may help.
- Keeping all surfaces regularly cleaned.
- Avoid sharing phone handsets & mobiles.
- When the risk increases, wear Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) e.g. gloves, masks.
- Avoiding contact with ill persons e.g. hand shakes, kissing.
- Require ill persons to stay at home.
- Covering your nose and mouth with a tissue when people cough or sneeze.
- Throwing used tissues in the bin.
- Washing your hands with soap and water, or using an alcohol-based hand gel after coughing or sneezing.
- Minimising international and interstate travel – especially to Mexico and USA.
- Avoiding crowds and travel on mass transport systems whilst ill.
- Seeking immediate medical care if people are severely ill (such as having trouble breathing).
- Taking prescribed antiviral medications for prevention and treatment.

We have a pandemic plan. What should we do now?

- Review your current pandemic plan and ensure all response strategies and appendices are updated.
- Review procedures relating to:
 - Communication
 - Infection Control
 - Social Distancing
 - Critical Business Functions
 - Alternate Workplace Arrangements
- Ensure the various severity phases/scenarios and responses for each pandemic phase are updated and remain appropriate.
- Check the 'use by' dates on flu supplies and PPE.
- Convene a meeting of the pandemic committee or equivalent to conduct a risk assessment of the situation assessing likelihood and consequences.
- Review planned controls and assess the need to put additional treatment strategies in place.

We do not have a Pandemic plan. What should we do now?

The response strategy and priorities will vary depending on the nature of your industry, business activities, location, dependencies and stakeholders. Here are some suggestions.

- Do not panic and do not try to put a pandemic response plan together in a week.
- Assign additional resources to assess the situation and key impacts and dependencies on service levels, staffing, suppliers, building services, clients, reputation, legal obligations, contract obligations, market share, economic impact, revenue and cash flow.
- Raise the pandemic issue at a senior management meeting to assess the potential impact on critical business function of your business.
- Establish your maximum tolerable service levels with a reduced workforce.
- Consider how you will run your business with 30-50% less staff.
- Convene the OH&S committee or equivalent for a situation assessment.
- Conduct a risk assessment of the situation assessing likelihood and consequences.
- Assess the need to put additional treatment strategies in place.
- Assess the need to assign a dedicated co-ordinator.
- Assess the need for specialist external support.
- If deemed a “high risk”, consider convening a crisis committee meeting.
- Take measures to reduce the risk of spreading the flu in the workplace.
- Consider purchasing adequate supplies of tissues, masks, gloves, cleaning products and anti-viral medication.
- Prepare and distribute workplace pandemic handouts and install signage.
- Review the succession plan. Ensure alternates are identified for key positions.
- Assess the need to cross-train staff in key service areas and activities.
- Assign a person/co-ordinator to continually monitor the situation.
- Communicate the situation to staff and key stakeholders regularly. Suggested topics:
 - The pandemic status.
 - The organisations preparations for staff should the influenza pandemic spread including identified priority work arrangements.
 - Changes to work requirements.
 - How to protect themselves and family (hygiene, social distancing).
 - Recommend staff stay up to date with the latest news.
 - Limiting travel.
 - Counselling and other available support.

About InConsult

InConsult is a specialist risk management consulting firm that provides a comprehensive range of risk management and business continuity solutions including pandemic preparedness assessment, training, testing and planning.

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