QUEENSLAND MUSEUM

# SWINE INFLUENZA (H1N1)

## FACT SHEET



Q26-027

Queensland Government

# WHAT IS SWINE INFLUENZA?

Swine influenza (swine flu; H1N1 flu) is a highly contagious zoonotic disease caused by strains of influenza A viruses that circulate in pigs and can infect humans.

ℹ The 2009 H1N1 strain now circulates as a normal seasonal flu virus in Australia.

## Natural hosts

Pigs are the main natural reservoir hosts.

## How is it spread?

Swine influenza is highly contagious. Infection is spread between animals through direct close contact:

- between infected pigs (e.g. nose-to-nose contact in close housing)
- with infected pigs' airborne droplets and secretions (e.g. from coughing or sneezing).

Human-to-pig transmission is possible.

Pig-to-human transmission can occur through:

- handling or processing infected pigs
- inhalation of infected airborne respiratory droplets
- contact with objects contaminated with infected pigs' body fluids, such as cages, equipment, pens, vehicles and clothing.

ℹ Eating pork does not transmit the virus. Pork is safe when cooked.

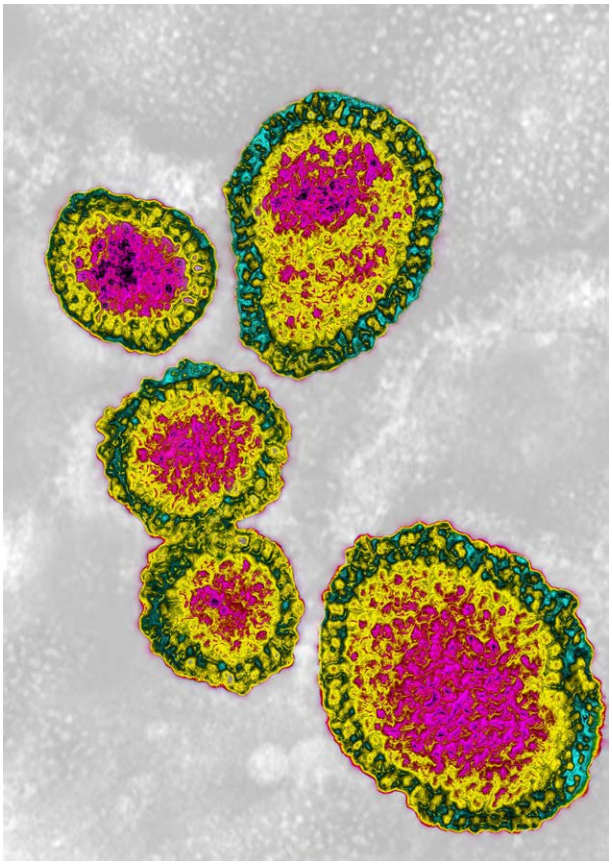
Human-to-human transmission occurs as with any seasonal flu – through coughing, sneezing, talking or touching contaminated surfaces.

ℹ Swine influenza spreads between humans just as easily as other flu viruses.

## Who is at risk?

Anyone who has close contact with infected pigs is at risk. This includes vets and vet nurses, pig farmers, pig owners and breeders, animal transporters, abattoir workers and people attending agricultural shows.

ℹ Most Australians who get swine flu are infected by other humans, not pigs.



## What are the symptoms?

### In animals

Within 1–3 days after infection, pigs may show symptoms that include:

- fever
- cough
- sneezing
- lethargy
- nasal discharge
- reduced appetite.

⚠ Swine flu spreads quickly, often infecting most pigs in a herd within days.

### In humans

Some infections cause no symptoms (asymptomatic infection). Mild cases cause typical flu symptoms. People infected with swine flu are considered to be infectious from one day before symptoms start to 5–7 days after the first symptom. Like other flus, swine flu may lead to potentially severe respiratory infection (pneumonia).

Symptoms may include:

- fever
- chills
- cough
- sore throat
- runny nose
- sneezing
- muscle aches and pains
- headache
- fatigue
- nausea
- vomiting
- diarrhoea
- pneumonia.

⚠ While most healthy people recover on their own, influenza is more severe than the common cold and can lead to serious complications like pneumonia.

## How can I prevent infection?

The annual flu vaccination protects against circulating H1N1 strains in humans and is the best way to prevent severe infection. It is recommended for everyone aged 6 months and over. Swine influenza vaccines are available for pigs and may reduce infection spread in herds.

ⓘ Vaccination helps protect both you and the herd.

Other infection prevention measures include:

- maintaining good hygiene practices (frequent handwashing and covering coughs and sneezes)
- avoiding close contact with sick pigs and sick people
- using personal protective equipment (PPE) in high-risk settings.

ⓘ Preventing pig-to-pig transmission reduces the risk of human infection.




## What treatments are available?

Antiviral medications may be prescribed early in the infection to reduce the severity and duration of symptoms.

ⓘ Antibiotics are not effective against viruses but may be used to treat secondary infections like pneumonia.

If you think you may have been exposed to swine influenza, please contact your doctor or public health agency for further advice.

**Cover:** A small pig farm for breeding hogs. Courtesy: Alamy/Zoonar GmbH
**Page 2:** Swine influenza visualised by HDRI image treatment, on a view under transmission electron microscope. Courtesy: Alamy/BSIP
**Page 3:** Tamiflu is an antiviral medication used to treat various strains of influenza, including swine flu and avian flu. Courtesy: Alamy/Martin Shields

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