



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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ADPH steps up activities in response to swine flu

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Alabama Department of Public Health Bureau of Clinical Laboratories has received more than 70 samples to screen for swine influenza. Two probable cases of swine flu were identified in elementary school students in Madison County Wednesday.

The department is working with hospitals in Madison County and throughout the state to monitor the incidence of pneumonia and influenza-like illnesses and deaths. During Alabama's traditional flu season of February through early April, a sentinel provider network of physicians reports influenza cases to the state health department. This medical provider network now is being reinstated to monitor swine flu. In addition, the department is working with Alabama schools to monitor absenteeism. Employers and employees are also asked to review their continuity of operations plans.

"So far, swine flu we are seeing is a mild and treatable disease, no worse than regular seasonal influenza," Dr. Donald Williamson, state health officer, said. "We control our own individual risk of acquiring infection. If you are a parent, we encourage you to keep sick children home from school and other activities until they are well and to follow their doctors' recommendations. We also encourage you to think about how you will manage your child if your child's school closes."

The symptoms of swine flu in people appear to be similar to the symptoms of regular human influenza and include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people have reported diarrhea and vomiting associated with swine flu. Ill persons should voluntarily isolate themselves from others for seven days after they experience symptoms. Close contacts should limit their contact with others for a period of seven days from the time they were exposed.

The incubation period from the moment of exposure to swine flu until symptoms develop is two to seven days. Individuals are infectious to others one day before until seven days after symptoms develop. Persons who develop symptoms of respiratory illness should contact their medical provider who can arrange for tests to determine whether the disease is due to swine flu.

Antiviral drugs such as Tamiflu and Relenza are available by prescription. These drugs are effective in this disease if the patient starts to take them within the first 48 hours of illness. All persons are reminded to follow these precautions:

- Cover your cough or sneeze with a sleeve or tissue.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers are also effective.
- Avoid touching your mouth, eyes and nose with your hands.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- If you get sick, stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to avoid infecting them. Patients experiencing severe symptoms, such as difficulty breathing, should seek health care and treatment.

Swine influenza virus is a respiratory infection caused by influenza type A viruses that typically cause outbreaks of influenza in pigs. People do not normally get swine flu, but human infections can occur. Human cases typically involve people who have had direct contact with pigs, but person-to-person transmission is suspected among recent cases.

Eating pork or pork products does not lead to the transmission of swine influenza. As with seasonal flu, swine flu may cause a worsening of underlying chronic medical conditions.

Updates for the news media will be held on a regular basis. For information about swine flu, please visit www.adph.org.