

News Release: Swine Flu

Allegany and Cattaraugus Counties' Health Departments are working together to educate their county residents about swine flu. The New York State Department of Health has set up a 24 hour/day, 7 days a week toll free hotline to answer questions from the public. This number is 1-800-808-1987.

Both Health Department Public Health Directors, Barb Hastings and Lori Ballengee, agree the best advice to give county residents is **wash your hands**, stay home if you are ill, and keep children home who are ill. We know many county residents have questions about all the information in the media. Here are the answers to the most commonly asked questions:

What is swine flu?

Swine Influenza, also called swine flu, is a respiratory disease of pigs caused by type A influenza viruses. Outbreaks of swine flu happen regularly in pigs. People do not normally get swine flu, but human infections can and do happen. Most commonly, human cases of swine flu happen in people who are around pigs but it's possible for swine flu viruses to spread from person to person also.

Is swine flu the same as seasonal flu?

No. Seasonal flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by human influenza viruses. It can cause mild to severe illness and at times can lead to death. Human flu viruses change a little bit every year which is why people can get sick from the flu more than once. It is also why a new flu vaccine is produced each year; the vaccine must be made to protect against the particular viruses circulating that year.

Allegany and Cattaraugus Counties' Health Departments would like to remind county residents seasonal flu vaccine is still available, for those who have not had it. Those at high risk for seasonal flu should contact their physician about having the vaccine, including women who are pregnant, elderly, and young children. If you are at high risk for pneumonia, the health departments recommend contacting your physician for this vaccination.

Human and swine flu viruses are different. People who get vaccinated for human flu can still get sick from swine flu. Pigs that have been vaccinated for swine flu can still get sick from human flu. Symptoms of swine flu in people are no different from symptoms that people get when they are infected with human flu viruses. People infected with flu typically have **fever** (often high), **cough**, **body aches**, **headaches**, **fatigue** and **runny or stuffy nose**. Vomiting and diarrhea may also occur.

New York State Department of Health (DOH) Commissioner Richard F. Daines, M.D. said: "We have been preparing for an event such as this for years. We have the finest public health and health care systems and adequate supplies to address swine flu. We are implementing comprehensive plans that have been developed and practiced for many years and will mobilize our stockpiles of medical supplies as needed."

Deputy Commissioner Dr. Guthrie Birkhead, M.D., M.P.H., who heads DOH's Office of Public Health, said: "Although the New York cases to date have been mild, we are in close communication with clinicians and hospitals to identify more serious cases, should they occur,

and to make sure all necessary resources are available for treatment. I want to remind New Yorkers to take the same common sense precautions to prevent illness that you would take with any seasonal flu, such as staying home when you are ill. Parents do not need to keep otherwise healthy children home from school unless directed to do so by local school and health officials.”

It is important to note that ordinary seasonal flu, which has symptoms similar to swine flu, is still active in New York State. Precautionary measures for both seasonal flu and swine flu include:

- Washing your hands often with soap and warm water. Alcohol-based hand cleansers are also effective.
- Avoiding people who are ill.
- Staying home from work or school if you are sick.
- Using tissue when you cough, sneeze or spit, and dispose of the tissue in a covered trash bin.
- Keeping hands away from your face. Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.
- Cleaning shared space more often such as phone receivers, keyboards, steering wheels and office equipment.
- Refraining from sharing personal items such as forks, spoons, toothbrushes and towels.
- Do not travel when you are sick, unless it is to get medical care.

The public can obtain more information about swine flu and precautionary measures at NYSDOH’s web site at www.nyhealth.gov or the toll free hotline 1-800-808-1987, 24 hours a day/7 days a week.