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Swine flu

Don't panic; but be careful

By Dr. A. Kumar

What is swine flu? Swine flu or swine influenza is a disease that pigs get. Its virus is common throughout pig populations all over the world. The transmission of the virus from pigs to humans is quite rare and does not always lead to human influenza. In fact people with regular exposure to pigs are at increased risk of swine flu infection. Swine flu affecting humans is a version of H1N1 sub-type. Although quite a sizeable number of deaths have been reported from various countries, but don't forget that the deaths from the common flu also occur world wide every year. The readers must know who are more at risk from becoming seriously ill with swine. The people with:

- Chronic lung disease
- Asthmatics
- Chronic heart disease
- Chronic kidney disease
- Chronic liver disease
- Chronic neurological disorders like Parkinson's disease & multiple sclerosis
- Suppressed immune systems
- Diabetes
- Pregnant women,
- People aged 65 or older, and
- Young children under five.

According to the U.K. Health Protection Agency (HPA), the new swine flu virus is highly contagious and is spreading from person to person. Its spread is no different than the ordinary colds and flu. The H1N1 virus spread through the droplets that come out of the nose or mouth when someone coughs or sneezes. The life of the flu virus on a hard surface is up to 24 hours and just 20 minutes on a soft surface. According to the Health Protection Agency, the incubation period for swine flu can be up to seven days.

Complications : Swine flu can lead to a number of complications. In any type of flu, one of the most common complications is a secondary bacterial chest infection like infection of the airways & untreated, may lead to pneumonia. But antibiotics may usually cure it. Other rare complications include:

- tonsillitis,
- otitis media i.e. a build-up of fluid in the ear.
- septic shock or infection of the blood that causes a severe drop in blood pressure.

- meningitis (infection in the brain and spinal cord), and
- encephalitis (inflammation of the brain).

Symptoms : The symptoms are generally mild and just like ordinary flue but a small number of people have had more serious symptoms. If one has any of the following symptoms and a temperature of 38°C or above, then there are chances of Swine flue:

- a sudden fever
- a sudden cough.
- headache,
- tiredness,
- chills,
- aching muscles,
- limb or joint pain,
- diarrhoea or stomach upset,
- sore throat,
- runny nose,
- sneezing, or
- loss of appetite.

In case you have a serious existing illness that weakens your immune system or are pregnant or you have a sick child under one, your condition suddenly gets much worse, or your condition is still getting worse after seven days (five days in the case of a child) + any one of the above mentioned symptoms, contact your G.P. without delay.

Causes : As explained earlier, the swine flu virus is spread in exactly the same way as the ordinary cold and flu viruses. The virus is contained in the millions of tiny droplets that come out of the nose and mouth when someone coughs or sneezes.

These droplets typically spread in about 3 feet of area. They hang suspended in the air for a while, but then land on surfaces, where the virus can survive for up to 24 hours, depending upon the type of the surface.

Anyone who touches these surfaces can get the virus and spread the virus further on by touching anything else.

Everyday items at home and in public places may have traces of the virus. These include food, door handles, the remote control, hand rails and computer keyboards.

People usually become infected by picking up the virus on their hands from contaminated objects and then placing their hands near their mouth or nose. It is also possible to breathe in the virus if it is suspended in airborne droplets.

Prevention : Maintaining good hygiene is the best course to keep the virus away. One should always :

- ensure everyone washes their hands regularly with soap and water,
- clean surfaces regularly to get rid of germs,
- use tissues to cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze, and
- put used tissues in a bin as soon as possible.

Cleansing agents : To minimize the risk of spreading swine flue, both alcohol handrubs and washing with soap and water are important as they both deactivate the flu virus. Alcohol handrub can only be used on visibly clean hands. If hands are dirty, soap and water should be used. Handrubs are useful when there is no easy access to a place to wash and dry your hands.

Treatment : Researchers have come to a conclusion that antiviral medicines Oseltamavir (Tamiflu) and Zanamivir (Relenza) are useful in the treatment of swine flue. However, the drugs must be taken at or near the start of the illness to be effective. In fact Antivirals are not a cure but they help to recover by relieving some of the symptoms, reduces the length of time of illness by around a day, and reduces the potential for serious complications, such as pneumonia. Tamiflu should first be taken within 12 to 48 hours of symptoms appearing. It works better the earlier you start taking it.

Interaction with other drugs : Tamiflu is not expected to alter the effect of any other medicines. If you are taking other medicines and have any questions or concerns, you should speak to your GP. According to NHS bulletin on Swine flue, . Tamiflu can be taken with paracetamol, ibuprofen or Aspirin.

Vaccination : Scientists are just close to it and the vaccine could be licensed by the European Medicines Agency (EMA) by early October. After that, the vaccination would start reaching countries worldwide.

Brief history of swine flue : Swine influenza was first proposed to be a disease related to human influenza during the 1918 flu pandemic. The H1N1 form of swine flu is one of the descendants of the strain that caused the 1918 flu pandemic. As well as persisting in pigs, the descendants of the 1918 virus have also circulated in humans through the 20th century, contributing to the normal seasonal epidemics of influenza. In recent times, the virus was first identified in Mexico in April 2009 and then spread around the globe. It has spread quickly because it is a new type of flu virus that few, if any, people have full resistance to. Last century, there were flu pandemics in 1918, 1957 and 1968 which took lives of millions of people across the world. However, in most cases the virus has proved relatively mild. But as hundreds of people have died world over, and it is not yet clear how big a risk this virus is. Moreover as all viruses can mutate to become more stronger, the medical fraternity says we need to be careful. (Ref. & Sources: mayo clinic us, nhs uk,)

For all chronic or other diseases like migraine, headaches, skin diseases, Eczema, leucorrhoea, arthritis, general weakness, diabetes, anaemia, male and female sexual problems and others, contact for free consultation on line or on phone :

For any advice, contact Dr. A. Kumar: info@yorkscollege.com

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exercise, you can remain healthy forever!**