

H1N1 SWINE FLU: USING FACEMASKS OR RESPIRATORS

What is the H1N1 Swine Flu?

Influenza A causes illness in humans and many animals. Some flu viruses are adapted to pigs and cause respiratory illness in them, and so have been called "swine flu." The swine flu is not transmitted from pigs to humans or caused by eating pork. The swine flu epidemic has been confirmed to be transmitted by person to person contact. The CDC has determined that the swine flu virus causing mild illness in some states is the same strain as the virus causing an outbreak of respiratory illness among humans in some areas of Mexico.

Signs and symptoms of swine flu

Human symptoms for this new type of swine flu are similar to the symptoms of regular human flu that happens every year. These include: **fever, cough and sore throat. In addition, fatigue, lack of appetite, runny nose, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea have been reported.**

How does swine flu spread?

Swine flu is thought to spread the same way the seasonal flu spreads, mainly from person to person through coughing or sneezing of people with the flu. It may also be spread by touching something with the flu virus on it then touching their mouth or nose.

Steps to lessen the spread of flu, while caring for the ill

When providing care to a household member who is sick with influenza, the most important ways to protect yourself and others who are not sick are to:

- Keep the sick person away from other people as much as possible (about 6 feet away, if possible).
- Remind the sick person to cover their coughs, and clean their hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub often, especially after coughing and/or sneezing.
- Have everyone in the household clean their hands often, using soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Keep the sick person in a room separate from the common areas of the house. Keep the sickroom door closed.

Contact Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department if you have questions or suspected cases of swine flu.

Interim recommendations for Facemask and Respirator Use

- If used correctly, facemasks and respirators may help reduce the risk of getting influenza, but they should be used along with other preventive measures, such as avoiding close contact and maintaining good hand hygiene.
- Facemasks should be considered for use by individuals who enter crowded settings, both to protect their nose and mouth from other people's coughs and to reduce the wearers' likelihood of coughing on others.
- Respirators should be considered for use by individuals for whom close contact with an infectious person is unavoidable. This can include selected individuals who must care for a sick person (e.g., family member with a respiratory infection) at home.
- A **respirator** that fits snugly on your face can filter out small particles that can be inhaled around the edges of a facemask, but compared with a facemask it is harder to breathe through a respirator for long periods of time.
- Facemasks and respirators may be purchased at a pharmacy, building supply or hardware store.
- Used facemasks and respirators should be taken off and placed immediately in the regular trash so they don't touch anything else.
- After you take off a facemask or respirator, clean your hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- More information on facemasks and respirators can be found at www.cdc.gov/swineflu.

Seek emergency medical care if the sick person at home:

- has difficulty breathing or chest pain
- has purple or blue discoloration of the lips
- is vomiting and unable to keep liquids down
- has signs of dehydration such as dizziness when standing, absence of urination, or in infants, a lack of tears when they cry
- has seizures (for example, uncontrolled convulsions)
- is less responsive than normal or becomes confused