



# Clinical Update

## For Telephone Triage Nurses

May 2009

Page 1 of 2

### In this Issue:

- NEW Swine Flu Exposure guideline

## H1N1 Influenza Virus (Swine Flu)

### Dear Nursing Colleague:

The clinical presentation and what we know about the 2009 H1N1 influenza virus (Swine Flu) is evolving daily.

We have created an interim telephone triage guideline for use in your medical call center. We expect that we will need to modify this document a couple times in the next several weeks. Thus, the title of the current first version of this guideline is "Swine Flu Exposure - Interim 05.01.2009". Your call center software vendor should have sent this to you on May 1st 2009.

Here are some of the best sources of reliable and up to date information on the internet.

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, United States (CDC); Swine Flu Web site at <http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/>
- Swine Flu Video PodCast by Joseph Bresee MD, Chief, Epidemiology & Prevention Branch, CDC; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-nTQDs7ZQGO>
- Health Canada; [http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/alert-alerte/swine\\_200904-eng.php](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/alert-alerte/swine_200904-eng.php)

We also wanted to take a minute and thank you for your outstanding work and dedication during this time of increased call volume and public anxiety. While we all agree that most of our callers do not have the H1N1 flu, we also recognize that these patients require the much-needed reassurance only you can give.

Warm regards,  
Barton Schmitt MD  
David Thompson, MD

### Swine Flu Exposure - Interim 05.01.2009

Adult After-Hours Version

- DEFINITION -

\* Exposure to Swine Influenza (Swine Flu)  
\* Questions about Swine Influenza

EXPOSURE to Swine Influenza, is defined as:

\* CLOSE HOME CONTACT: Lives with someone with known or suspected swine flu.  
\* CLOSE CONTACT (within 3 feet, 1 meter; touching distance) with a person with known or suspected Swine Flu. Examples of such close contact include kissing or embracing, sharing eating or drinking utensils, close conversation, performing a physical examination (relevant to health care providers), and any other direct contact with respiratory secretions of a person with Swine Flu.  
\* TRAVEL TO Mexico.  
\* TRAVEL TO community either within the United States or internationally where there are one or more confirmed cases of Swine Flu.  
\* LIVES IN a community where there are one or more confirmed cases of Swine Flu.

- INITIAL ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS -

1. PLACE OF EXPOSURE: "Where were you when you were exposed to Swine Flu?" (e.g., city, state, country)  
2. TYPE OF EXPOSURE: "How were you exposed?" (e.g., close human contact, pig contact)  
3. DATE OF EXPOSURE: "When did the exposure occur?" (e.g., days)  
4. SYMPTOMS: "Do you have any symptoms?" (e.g., runny nose, stuffy nose, sore throat, cough, cough, breathing difficulty, fever)  
5. ONSET OF SYMPTOMS: "When did your symptoms start?"

- BACKGROUND INFORMATION -

SWINE FLU IN PIGS

\* Swine flu is a respiratory illness of pigs caused by type A influenza virus. It regularly causes outbreaks of influenza in pigs.  
\* Symptoms: In pigs signs can include sudden onset of fever, coughing (barking), discharge from the nose or eyes, sneezing, difficulty breathing, eye redness, and eating less.  
\* Prognosis: Most pigs recover completely.  
\* Vaccine: There is a vaccine that can be given to pigs to prevent swine flu. It does not work on humans!

SWINE FLU IN HUMANS

\* Swine flu viruses normally do not infect humans. Cases of swine flu spread from pigs to humans in Mexico during March 2009. An outbreak of swine flu in humans occurred in the U.S. and Canada April 2009.  
\* Incubation Period: After exposure, a person will come down with swine flu symptoms in 1 to 4 days. The longest incubation period is thought to be 7 days.  
\* Symptoms: The symptoms of swine flu are similar to those of regular human influenza. The main symptoms are runny nose, sore throat, cough, and fever. Other common symptoms are muscle pain, headache and fatigue. Some people also have vomiting and diarrhea.  
\* Prognosis and Symptom Severity: Symptoms of swine flu can be mild to severe, just as with regular human influenza. Thus far in the US and Canada, the symptoms have generally been mild; it is hoped that complications uncommon and death will be rare.  
\* Complications: The worst complications are pneumonia and respiratory distress or failure. Complications are more likely to occur in certain high risk patients (see list below)

Page 1 of 13

Swine Flu Exposure - Interim 05.01.2009 2009

Schmitt-Thompson  
Clinical Content

# Clinical Update

## For Telephone Triage Nurses

Page 2 of 2

May 2009



### What are the symptoms of H1N1 influenza (Swine Flu)?

- ◆ The symptoms of H1N1 flu are similar to those of regular human influenza or a bad cold. The complication rate does not appear to be higher than for human influenza. As of May 1st 2009, there have been 16 deaths in Mexico and 1 in the U.S.
- ◆ Patients with this flu have **both fever AND one or more respiratory symptoms** (e.g., cough, runny nose, and sore throat).
- ◆ Other common symptoms are muscle pain, headache and fatigue. Some people also have vomiting and diarrhea, but never as the only symptoms.

### Are there antiviral medication that can be used to treat Swine Flu?

- ◆ Two medications licensed in the U.S. and Canada are believed to be effective in treating this swine influenza virus: oseltamavir (Tamiflu) and zanamivir (Relenza).
- ◆ Treatment is generally **not recommended** for mild influenza-like illness in most patients. A patient should only take one of these antiviral medications if it has been prescribed by his or her physician.



### When should a person go to the emergency department?

Emergency Departments and Urgent Care Centers are getting swamped with patient with colds and other minor respiratory illnesses. One important reason to prevent unnecessary visits to the Emergency Department and Urgent Care Center is that these are the places where a person is more likely to be exposed to Swine Flu!

Reasons for an **adult** to go to the Emergency Department include:

- ◆ Difficulty breathing
- ◆ Chest pain
- ◆ Severe weakness
- ◆ Severe repeated vomiting

Reasons for a **child** to go to the Emergency Department include:

- ◆ Difficulty breathing or rapid breathing
- ◆ Bluish skin color
- ◆ Signs of dehydration
- ◆ Not waking up or not interacting
- ◆ Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held

**Reassure callers that their primary care provider can manage most cases of Swine Flu.**