



Information for patients and flu friends about swine flu and how it is treated

What is swine flu?

Influenza A/H1N1 (known as swine flu) is a new type of influenza (or flu) that has emerged because of changes to the swine influenza virus circulating in the US. The virus can infect humans and spreads easily. For these reasons and the way the virus has spread around the world, the World Health Organisation declared a pandemic.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms are similar to those of seasonal flu infection and include fever, fatigue, lack of appetite, coughing, sore throat, joint pain, headache and a runny nose. Some people with swine flu have also reported vomiting and diarrhoea.

How does swine flu move from person to person?

It is thought to spread in the same way as seasonal flu, through droplet transmission by coughing, sneezing or even talking to someone. Because of their size, these droplets do not remain in the air for long and do not travel more than a distance of one metre, so fairly close contact is required. The virus can be passed directly from person to person, through skin to skin or oral contact. It can also be passed by indirect contact.

How is swine flu treated?

GPs are no longer routinely prescribing or recommending antiviral medicines for anyone other than the patient themselves. There are two types of antivirals. One is called Tamiflu and is prescribed for most people, the other is Relenza, for people with certain conditions, usually pregnant women or people with kidney trouble. Antivirals are not a 'cure' but can reduce the virus spreading in your body and can help you to recover more quickly. They also reduce the risk of complications and slow its spread. They do not offer longer term protection. If you have been given antiviral medicine, you should complete the whole course of treatment. The leaflet with the medicine contains further information.

What can I do to help myself and others?

The best way to avoid transmission is to keep all surfaces clean and to follow the advice below:

CATCH IT: germs spread easily. Always carry tissues and use them to catch your cough or sneeze.

BIN IT: Germs can live for several hours on tissues. Dispose of them as soon as possible.

KILL IT: Hands can transfer germs to any surface you touch. Clean your hands as soon as you can.

Where should the antiviral medicines be collected?

If your GP says you have swine flu, you should not collect the antiviral medicine yourself. Your flu friend should do this for you. This is to reduce the risk of you spreading the virus to others. A flu friend is a family member, friend or neighbour who can collect the prescription from one of a number of antiviral collection points set up across Devon. When the GP has given you a prescription for the antiviral medicine, they will tell you which collection point your flu friend will need to attend to pick it up. They will also tell you the opening times. If it is late in the day' they may have to pick them up the following morning. There is no cost for this treatment. Please note that your flu friend must identify themselves when collecting the medicine. They will also need ID for you. A valid driving licence, passport or utility bill will suffice. If they cannot produce these it could delay your treatment. Antiviral collection points can be quite busy places. Your flu friend should be prepared for a short wait, although this will be kept to the absolute minimum.

How do I get antivirals if I don't have a flu friend?

The PCT can provide a flu friend service for vulnerable people who would not otherwise be able to access antiviral medicines without it.

It is extremely important that the service is not misused as this could result in those in real need failing to receive their medication.

To arrange delivery, patients in need should call 0844 412 2840. There is no charge for delivery but patients using the service should expect to wait up to 24-hours before the medicine is delivered.

Where can I get more information?

Door-to-door leaflets about swine flu were sent to households earlier this year. Copies of these are also available on site. If you don't see one, just ask. There's a lots of information at www.nhs.uk/Pages/HomePage.aspx or www.devonpct.nhs.uk or for less specific information, contact the national pandemic information line on 0800 1 513 513.