



## Background

The 2009 swine flu outbreak is an epidemic that began in April 2009 with a new strain of influenza virus. The new strain is commonly called swine flu, but it is also called Mexican flu, North American influenza and 2009 H1N1 flu. The outbreak is believed to have started in March 2009 and was classified as meeting the criteria for the World Health Organization pandemic Phase 5 status on 29 April. By April 28, the new strain was confirmed to have spread to Spain, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, and Israel, and the virus was suspected in many other nations, with a total of over 3,000 candidate cases, prompting the World Health Organization (WHO) to change its pandemic alert phase to "Phase 5", which denotes "widespread human infection".

Despite the scale of the alert, the WHO stated on April 29 that the majority of people infected with the virus have made a full recovery without need of medical attention or antiviral drugs.

## Why is this disease called swine flu?

Pigs (or swine) can harbour influenza virus and when the influenza virus multiplies in infected pigs the genes of the Influenza virus changes and new influenza strains occur. Some animal influenza strains can infect humans and cause disease. The 2009 swine flu is infectious and has started to spread to humans around the world.

## What are the symptoms for swine flu?

The symptoms to swine flu are similar to the common cold or influenza. Typical symptoms are sudden fever, runny nose, sore throat and coughing. Other symptoms may include nausea, vomiting, lethargy and diarrhoea. If anyone has these symptoms they may have the "common cold" however given the concern about swine flu we advise that you promptly see your doctor.

### Swine flu confirmed cases and deaths as at 8 July 2009

Confirmed cases worldwide	>98,000
No deaths worldwide	>440
Confirmed cases Australia (ACT 280; NSW 1,572; NT 392; Qld 1,479; SA 686; Tas 120; Vic 1,876; WA 362)	6,767
No deaths Australia	20

Source: <http://www.thewest.com.au>—Swine flu to dominate as more die, 08/07/09

## What precautions can I take to prevent becoming infected?

### See your doctor

As winter approaches Australia is entering the regular "flu" season. Anyone with flu-like symptoms such as a sudden fever, cough or muscle aches should see their doctor immediately.

### Keep your distance

Avoiding large gatherings, travelling overseas and staying at home if you have the flu are typical precautions. As influenza spreads through infected droplets or saliva do not be in close proximity to anyone with flu-symptoms. Health authorities strongly advise not to be touching the mouth, nose or eyes of any infected person as these are primary modes of transmission. When coughing, it is recommended to be coughing into a tissue and disposing of the tissue, then immediately washing the hands.

### Wash your hands regularly with soap and water

Recommendations to prevent spread of the virus among humans include frequent washing of hands with soap and water or with alcohol-based hand sanitizers, especially after being out in public.

### Do I need a face mask?

The UK Health Protection Agency considers facial masks unnecessary for the general public.

### Eating pork is OK

Swine flu cannot be spread by pork products, since the virus is not transmitted through food. Please contact your doctor regarding the availability of swine flu vaccine.

### Overseas travel

If you plan to travel overseas you should contact your doctor about the human health status of the country you are visiting. If a country has swine flu or any serious disease it is advisable to not travel at this time. If you have been in a country that has swine flu you should get a clearance from your doctor to return to work.

## Do laundry workers need to take extra precautions to minimise the possible spread of swine flu?

The simple answer is Yes.

People infected with swine flu are likely to infect bed, table, hygiene (roller towels), hospital linen and industrial textiles that



they come in contact with. These soiled materials are returned to customers daily. There are close to 7,000 confirmed cases of swine flu in Australia, and Australian health authorities believe that more swine flu cases are likely to occur in coming months.

## Recommendations for laundries

- Provide sort crew employees with protective aprons, gloves, etc to minimise contact with contaminated items.
- Wash all soiled items in hot water, according to AS/NZS 4146 : 2000.
- Restrict the sorting crew employees having access to the clean finished materials areas to prevent cross-contamination.
- Monitor all staff that have "flu-like" symptoms such as sudden fever, runny nose, sore throat and coughing.
- Send any employee with influenza-like symptoms home and advise them to see a doctor before they return to work.
- Encourage all staff to avoid direct contact with anyone with flu-like symptoms.
- Cover your face and wash your hands with soap and water if you come in contact with anyone with influenza-like symptoms.
- Advise staff to regularly wash their hands with soap and water throughout the day in case they have had direct contact with anyone with a flu infection.
- Adopt heightened vigilance where swine flu cases have been detected in your supply chain.
- Check state authority communication updates.

