



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

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State Health Commissioner

Department of Health
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RICHMOND, VA 23218

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1-800-828-1120

HEALTH ALERT

Dear Colleague,

I want to bring to your attention a **rapidly evolving public health issue**. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has documented a **novel swine flu influenza virus** over the last few days that appears to be transmitted human-to-human. At this time, the level of alert for pandemic influenza is unchanged. However, it is important that you be aware of the case definition and the guidelines for testing for swine influenza.

In order to protect the public's health, I am requesting that you do the following:

- **Maintain a high index of suspicion;**
- **Obtain a thorough travel history, with particular focus on the specific destinations listed below, for patients who meet the case definition; and**
- **Arrange for specimen testing for patients who meet the case definition.**

Between April 21-23, 2009, eight laboratory-confirmed cases have been identified in individuals residing in the states of California and Texas. Of these 8 cases, one was hospitalized and all have recovered. In addition, the CDC has confirmed swine influenza in 7 samples from cases in Mexico that match the U.S. cases. CDC is working closely with local and state health departments to investigate these cases in an effort to determine the source of the infection and whether or not additional people have been infected with swine influenza viruses. This is a rapidly evolving situation and information is preliminary at this time.

Swine influenza is a respiratory disease caused by type A influenza virus that commonly infects pigs, causing seasonal outbreaks of disease among swine. Due to the ability of the virus to mutate, sporadic human infections can occur. The symptoms of swine influenza are similar to seasonal influenza and typically include fever, cough, sore throat, nasal congestion, and rhinorrhea. Additional symptoms may include diarrhea, vomiting, headache, chills, fatigue, dyspnea, pneumonia and respiratory failure. Persons with swine influenza are contagious for up to seven days after the onset of illness and possibly longer if symptomatic.

At this point in this investigation, the route of transmission of the virus has not been identified and it is not known how easily the virus can be spread from one person to another. Interim recommendations issued by CDC have been summarized below and they can be found at <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/swine/recommendations.htm>.

- Infection should be considered in patients who present with a febrile illness (fever $\geq 100^{\circ}\text{F}$ plus a cough and/or sore throat, in the absence of another cause) and
 - Live in or have traveled to San Diego and/or Imperial County, California or Guadeloupe County, Texas or Mexico.
 - Have been in contact with ill persons from these areas in the 7 days prior to their illness onset.
- Notify your local health department in order to arrange for specimen testing at the Division of Consolidated Laboratory Services (DCLS)
- If swine influenza is suspected in a patient meeting the above criteria, a respiratory specimen should be collected within 4 to 5 days of illness using a specimen collection kit issued by DCLS
- As always, persons with respiratory illness should be instructed to stay home from school or work, cover their cough and perform hand hygiene frequently
- For interviewing individuals suspected or confirmed to have swine influenza, keep at a distance of 6 feet or wear a fit-tested N-95 respirator (if unavailable use a surgical mask/medical mask)
- For collecting specimens from suspected or confirmed cases, use a fit-tested disposable N-95 respirator. Place all used respirators in a biohazard bag for removal and wash hands thoroughly after handling
- For non-hospitalized patients: place individuals in a separate room, if available and place a mask on the patient during transport. While providing medical care wear disposal gloves, gowns, goggles and a N-95 respirator (if unavailable use a surgical/medical mask)
- For hospitalized patients: use standard, droplet and contact precautions for 7 days after illness onset or until symptoms have resolved. Additionally personnel should enter the room wearing gloves, gowns, goggles and N-95 respirators.

- Place patient in an isolation room with negative pressure air handling if possible, otherwise use a private room with the door kept closed.

The Virginia Department of Health will continue to monitor this situation. We will also do our best to keep you informed of information pertinent to your practice. Please contact your local health department toll-free at 1-866-531-3068 if you have any questions or concerns. This number will be answered 24 hours a day. You may also contact the Office of Epidemiology at (804) 864-8141.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Karen Remley".

Karen Remley, MD, MBA
State Health Commissioner