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"Four Questions for the Novel H1N1 Flu 'Outbreak'"



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## Four Questions for the Novel H1N1 Flu "Outbreak"

### What the heck just happened!

Sometimes it is important to step back and take a good look around in the midst of turmoil. This is a summary of the influenza virus originally found in Texas, California, and Mexico in March and April of 2009.

The virus was first detected in two cases in Southern California in late March. When this novel virus was publicized, officials in Mexico suspected a link to an outbreak of late-season flu cases they were finding. Within days, hundreds more suspected cases were discovered in Mexico, with more cases also showing up in the U.S. and several other countries.<sup>1</sup> Because the H1 portion of the virus held genetic patterns earlier identified in H1N1 Influenza common in pigs, the virus suddenly became referred to as "Swine Flu".

### Is this a health risk to my family?

The Novel H1N1 outbreak is a significant human health concern. Originally, this virus had not been detected in livestock including swine. Secretary Napolitano stated the following during her declaration – **"Preliminary investigations have determined that none of the people infected with the hybrid flu had contact with hogs. This virus is different, very different from that found in pigs."** Unfortunately, the message still didn't get through... it's people not pigs...

Signs of the Novel Influenza H1N1 in people are very similar to the signs of regular seasonal human flu and include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headaches, lethargy, and in some cases nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea. Much like the seasonal flu, Novel H1N1 in people is capable of causing disease symptoms from mild to severe. Infected people generally shed the virus from one day prior to the development of clinical signs up to seven days following recovery.

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.
- Remind the sick person to cover their coughs, and clean their hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub often.
- Have everyone in the household clean their hands often.
- Ask your healthcare provider if household contacts of the sick person—particularly those contacts who may have chronic health conditions—should take antiviral medications such as Tamiflu® or Relenza® to prevent the flu.<sup>2</sup>

### Is this a risk to my swine herd?

At this time, no U.S. pigs have been found to be infected or sick with the virus. It is unknown if this new strain causes any type of illness in swine. However, because it is novel, the National Pork Board is urging producers to take extra precaution to protect our industry's workers and our animals.

It is logical to expect this virus will infect swine herds. It is also realistic to expect current vaccine protection will not fully prevent circulation of the virus. On the positive side, it is also realistic to expect the virus may behave like many other influenza virus introductions into your herd: moderate clinical disease that requires changes in herd health programs and pig flow dynamics.

To prevent the introduction of the new strain of influenza virus H1N1 into your operation, follow good biosecurity practices. Because people have been reported sick with this virus, make sure your biosecurity practices place special emphasis on protecting your animals and your operation's workers by monitoring all



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## Four Questions for the Novel H1N1 Flu "Outbreak" Cont.

persons having access to your operation.

Consider the following practices:

1. **Establish, implement, and enforce strict sick leave policies for workers with influenza-like symptoms (get a diagnosis not description of symptoms).**
2. **Implement biosecurity for workers reporting international travel.**
3. **Limit visitors to swine facilities.**
4. **Follow other generally accepted biosecurity practices:**
  - Enforce basic hygiene practices.
  - Pay attention to proper ventilation.
  - Implement and enforce the use of personal protective equipment.
  - Recommend that all workers are vaccinated against the seasonal influenza virus.
  - Review your current herd health programs with your veterinarian.

### How can we prevent this from ever happening again?

Seasonal flu prevention is already part of all sow herds we consult with. Seasonal influenza vaccination in people is also going to continue. The influenza virus in general and its risk to both your family and to your swine herd are both still the same as they were before this Novel H1N1 arrived. Our response is also expected to be much the same. Changes might include heightened awareness of biosecurity and sanitation, vaccination preparation efficiency, and of course image control.

<sup>1</sup>CDC Press Briefing Transcripts April 24, 2009<sup>1</sup>. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. April 24, 2009. <http://www.cdc.gov/media/transcripts/2009/t090424.htm>.

<sup>2</sup>Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. May 1, 2009. [http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/guidance\\_homecare.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/guidance_homecare.htm)

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<sup>1</sup> Amritkar, G., Doen, J. et al. 2007. "Review of *Listeria intracellularis* seroprevalence screening in the United States, June 2003 to July 2006." Proc. AAEP, 231-233.  
<sup>2</sup> Gastes, R. 2004. Update on epidemiology and diagnosis of porcine proliferative enteropathy. J. Swine Health Prod. 12.3.  
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