

## Swine Flu Frequently Asked Questions

### General Information

#### **What actions can I take to limit exposure?**

##### **Anywhere**

- frequent hand washing followed by application of waterless hand sanitizer; to be effective alone, hand washing with warm water and soap has to be for at least 20 seconds
- try not to touch your face, mouth, nose and eyes with your hands unless you have just washed and sanitized your hands
- if you wear contact lens, think about wearing glasses for the time being
- get good nights of sleep; be well rested
- maintain a healthy diet
- take a multi-vitamin to supplement your diet
- drink plenty of fluids; safe water is the best
- avoid extreme changes in temperature; going from very hot and humid to cold and dry environments several times a day
- if you must handle food stuffs, wear new, disposable gloves
- if you must handle trash and garbage, wear new, disposable gloves each time
- think about your interaction with people outside your immediate family; should you cancel engagements, should you not invite people to your home
- when in public, crowded locations use the N95 mask
- people with compromised health (such as chronic respiratory diseases, immune diseases, diabetes) should pay particular attention to any changes in their health and consult their physician about any additional precautions they should take
- if anyone develops flu like symptoms, such as chills, fever, malaise, nausea and vomiting, they should consult a physician immediately

##### **At work**

- at work and at home disinfect and sanitize telephones, computer keyboards and work space surfaces, do the same thing at home (kitchen surfaces, telephones, computer keyboards, television remote controls, toys). Repeatedly sanitize and disinfect any tools, equipment and surfaces that many people touch throughout the day
- can you restructure the workplace so people have exclusive use of telephones, computers and work space
- create a distance of 6+ feet between people working in the office

#### **I don't have any flu symptoms, but think I may have been exposed to Swine Flu - what should I do?**

Do not take Tamiflu if you do not have any symptoms. Taking Tamiflu prophylactically could be a danger to your personal health, as well as the larger public health effort against Swine Flu. Monitor your health for 10 days and contact a medical professional if you do experience flu symptoms.

**If I have flu-like symptoms, how long will it take to diagnose me?**

Dr. Walter “Ben” Koppel, MEDEX Medical Director, urges anyone with flu-like symptoms to consider themselves as having the flu until proven otherwise. The laboratory test for the swine flu takes a few days to obtain results. Even if the test is negative, patients should still be treated as if they have the disease.

**Can I conduct my own testing? Is there a kit?**

Actual identification of the type of influenza virus is not essential for treatment. Treatment for all viral respiratory conditions is the same – antiviral, fluids, fever medication, supportive care and isolation. All testing would take time and can be expensive. Any self diagnosis test kits may not be effective in properly diagnosing the Swine Flu.

**Travel****Is it safe to travel to risk-prone areas?**

Any unnecessary travel to risk-prone areas should be postponed or cancelled. If travel is needed, you should always check the CDC, WHO and your government’s public health authority websites for any travel advisories that may be issued for the country in question. Also, contacting MEDEX Assistance is always a smart way to obtain accurate and unbiased information. For tips on traveling to a risk-prone area, make sure you read and follow appropriate health precautions.

**People at higher/highest risk for contracting the Swine Flu are:**

- People who have direct contact with pigs;
- People with compromised immune systems or any other condition that can compromise respiratory function or the handling of respiratory secretions. (These conditions include difficulty breathing or swallowing; brain injury or disease; spinal cord injuries; seizure disorders, and other nerve or muscle disorders.)
- Adults of any age and children six-months and older with chronic heart or lung conditions, including asthma;
- Adults of any age and children six-months and older and adults who require regular medical care or were in a hospital during the previous year because of a metabolic disease such as diabetes, chronic kidney disease, or a weakened immune system (including those immune system problems caused by medicines or by infection with human immunodeficiency virus [HIV/AIDS]);
- People 65 years and older
- Children from six-months to 18 years of age who are on long-term aspirin therapy.
- Women who are pregnant;
- All children 6 to 23 months of age

### **Should I seek treatment locally or return home?**

If you have flu symptoms, MEDEX Assistance advises travelers to seek treatment immediately and locally for the following reasons:

- Local medical professionals are most familiar with Swine Flu and are therefore more likely to have the latest information and treatment options available to you
- Local treatment avoids potential spread of Swine Flu (and the common flu too)
- There may be travel restrictions for anyone who displays flu symptoms

### **How is the Mexican health care system?**

Mexico City has reliable medical care, through physicians and hospitals. So far, metropolitan Mexico City medical resources are not reporting that they are overwhelmed by Swine Flu cases. Certainly public hospital will likely be the first to see any surge in patients requiring admission to the hospital for severe flu symptoms. Mexico City has several private, acute care hospitals with appropriate physicians to attend flu patients. For expatriates and families, their first line of medical defense should be their personal physicians; internist, gynecologist and pediatrician. If a family does not have a personal physician, a fellow employee maybe able to recommend their practitioner and MEDEX can make referral to physicians.

## **Medication**

### **Will the common flu vaccine help me avoid Swine Flu?**

The common flu vaccine may not be effective against Swine Flu. However, MEDEX Assistance does advise travelers going to risk-prone areas to get the common flu vaccine to serve as a differentiator if flu symptoms present (see “Additional Recommendations from MEDEX Assistance” on page 11 for more information).

### **Will gamma globulin protect me?**

An injection of gamma globulin, or blood proteins, is sometimes given in an attempt to boost a patient’s immunity against disease. However, this is **not** an effective prophylactic measure. Because the swine flu is a new strain of flu virus, no one has any antibodies yet to help develop the gamma globulin.

### **What if I start experiencing flu symptoms & want to purchase Tamiflu?**

Purchasing Tamiflu overseas may be difficult for a number of reasons. First, some local officials have already stopped purchase of the drug by foreign physicians to combat stockpiling. If you do try to purchase the drug overseas, make sure you are working with a reputable medical facility or pharmacy. With a shortage of Tamiflu, counterfeit supplies may be a problem. MEDEX Assistance can direct you to a reputable provider, but cannot guarantee availability.

### **I'm traveling to a risk-prone area – will my physician write me a prescription for Tamiflu?**

As always, prior to travel, you should seek advice and information from your physician about any necessary immunizations. In the case of Swine Flu, since there is no vaccination, individuals may choose to ask their physician to prescribe Tamiflu for them prior to travel, and prior to any actual flu symptoms.

Here are some reasons why your doctor may refuse to do this:

- Your physician may determine that you are not at high risk for contracting the disease
- There is a short supply of Tamiflu worldwide. Medical professionals and public health officials are discouraging widespread prescriptions which could limit supply when and where it is needed most.
- Taking Tamiflu prophylactically is not recommended. Tamiflu is a prescription drug because it should be administered by a medical professional when symptoms are verified. Individuals obtaining Tamiflu and self-administering the drug is dangerous.
- Widespread and/or incorrect usage of Tamiflu could result in a mutation of the Swine Flu virus, rendering Tamiflu completely useless.
- Your physician may advise that you seek care locally if you experience flu symptoms (see answer below to “Should I seek care locally or return home?”).

### **If I do bring Tamiflu with me, what should I do during travel?**

Follow typical travel tips for traveling with prescription drugs, including the following:

- Carry all medications in your carry-on luggage
- To minimize the suspicion of customs officials, carry medications in their original labeled containers (not mixed in other containers)
- Carry your original, written prescriptions and, in a separate place, write down the name (including the generic name), strength and dose of your medications, with your doctor's name and contact information

Also, be sure to keep the Tamiflu in a secure location in hotel rooms, such as the hotel room safe or your luggage.

Store Tamiflu as directed by the manufacturer:

- Capsules: Store at 77° F (25° C); excursions permitted from 59° to 86° F (15° to 30° C)
- Tamiflu Suspension: Stored under refrigeration from 36° to 46° F (2° to 8° C) *Do not freeze*

### **Can MEDEX provide me with Tamiflu?**

Worldwide, national governments are in control of the stocks of Tamiflu and Relenza and are using them to treat confirmed cases. It is not currently available at pharmacies and hospitals in Mexico City. MEDEX is continuing the inquiry of Tamiflu availability in Mexico.

Also, MEDEX is unable to assist you in importing Tamiflu to any country, as it is under strict control by the government.

### **What if I start experiencing flu symptoms & I have Tamiflu in my possession already?**

MEDEX Assistance advises travelers who are experiencing flu symptoms in a risk-prone area to still seek medical care immediately – even if they brought Tamiflu with them. If a physician in your home country prescribed Tamiflu prior to your travels, try to contact your physician for specific instructions. You may also see a local medical professional who can provide advice. MEDEX Assistance can assist you in finding a local medical professional. *Keep in mind that Tamiflu should be administered by a medical professional within 48 hours from the first sign of flu symptoms.* Also, remember that Tamiflu has not been confirmed as a reliable treatment for Swine Flu. If you do have Swine Flu, local medical professionals will be most up-to-date on additional/ alternative treatments that may be available.

## **MEDEX**

### **How can I contact MEDEX from Mexico?**

There are several ways to contact MEDEX's 24/7 Emergency Response Center from Mexico.

- Toll Free: 00 1 800 101 0061
- Phone: 00 1 410 453 6330
- Fax: 00 1 410 453 6331
- Email: [Operations@medexassist.com](mailto:Operations@medexassist.com)

### **Can MEDEX help me identify the best hospitals and clinics to go to?**

Yes, MEDEX clients can call our Emergency Response Center to hospital information. Clients with access to the MEDEX Member Center can log in online and find this information in the MEDEX 360<sup>o</sup>m Global Medical Monitor portion of the site.

### **What should I do in case of an emergency because of the influenza?**

MEDEX can help you locate preferred providers and assist with direct billing. It's important to remember that when epidemic concerns exist, many local hospitals and doctors may still expect patients to pay cash upfront for services. With a higher influx of patients, cash payment is preferred and more expedient; this could be true for hospitals with which MEDEX already has billing arrangements.

### **Is MEDEX ready to support me for a medical evacuation?**

MEDEX can always assist with evacuation if it is permissible by both the Mexican and US governments. The evacuation will be reviewed by our medical team and would take place only if it is medically necessary.

### **What should I do if I'm in Mexico and want to get home? Or if I have travelers in Mexico?**

Any kind of travel during this epidemic is limited to government and airline rules and regulations. If you become sick, MEDEX will monitor your care, as we would during a non-epidemic situation.