

# **WORRIED ABOUT** **SWINE FLU?**

Important information for  
Bradford and Airedale  
residents about swine flu

Including information about the  
swine flu vaccine

November 2009

This booklet replaces the  
previous version of September 2009



**Flu. Protect yourself and others**

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# **GENERAL INFORMATION ON SWINE FLU**

## **What is swine flu and how is it spread?**

Swine flu is generally a mild illness and most people should start to feel better after a few days without needing to go to their GP or A&E. Because it is a new type of flu (Influenza A H1N1v) most people under 60 will have no immunity to it and therefore everyone is at risk of catching it.

**Flu viruses are spread in coughs and sneezes.** If you cough or sneeze into your hand, the virus can spread easily on to other surfaces like door handles and telephones when you touch them. If other people touch the same surfaces or are close to you and breathe in the air after you've coughed or sneezed then the virus can get into their bodies and give them the flu.

**There is no vaccine at the moment.** Influenza viruses change very quickly. For a vaccine to provide adequate protection it needs to be produced for the particular strain in circulation. Scientists are making good progress in developing a new vaccine for swine flu and we are expecting the first batches of vaccines in the autumn. There will be limited quantities initially and therefore high risk groups (see page 5) will be offered vaccination first. Further stocks will arrive in the autumn and winter, but it might well be next year before we can vaccinate everyone.

**People are infectious to others soon after they develop symptoms,** and they continue to produce the virus in coughs and sneezes, for up to five days after the symptoms start (seven days in children). People become less infectious as their symptoms subside, and once their symptoms are gone, they are no longer considered infectious to others. So **“Catch it, Bin it, Kill it”** is really important, see page 6.

## How do I know if I've got swine flu?

The symptoms of swine flu are very similar to the symptoms of normal flu. If you have swine flu you will have a high temperature which is 38°C (around 100°F) or above. You might also have two or more of the following symptoms:

- cough
- sore throat
- runny nose
- severe tiredness
- loss of appetite
- pain in muscles and joints
- headaches

Some people might also have diarrhoea or vomiting.

You can check your symptoms on the NHS Direct website at **[www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk)**. This website has a dedicated flu symptom checker which you can use to work out if you have the flu.

## Which people are most at high risk from swine flu?

Those who are at a higher risk of becoming seriously ill with flu include:

- pregnant women

People with:

- chronic lung disease or had drug treatment for asthma in the past three years
- cystic fibrosis
- a suppressed immune system (whether caused by disease or treatment)
- diabetes
- sickle cell disease
- chronic neurological disease, e.g. multiple sclerosis, cerebral palsy, stroke, muscular dystrophy
- chronic heart disease
- chronic kidney disease
- chronic liver disease

As well as:

- children aged under five and people aged over 65

So people in the above groups should seek medical advice:

- a) if they develop symptoms of swine flu,
- b) if a person they live with develops swine flu,

preferably within 48 hours of symptoms starting but up to seven days might still be useful. There is further information in the section headed 'More information for at risk groups' on page 11 .

Note: Current evidence suggests that children under three years old and people aged 65 and older seem less likely to be affected.

## What can I do to reduce my risk of catching or spreading swine flu?

There are important actions which all of us can take to reduce the risk of catching or spreading swine flu:

- Hygiene measures are essential to help to reduce the spread of all viruses, including the swine flu virus. These include:
  - **CATCH IT** - Covering your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing and using a tissue when possible – if someone coughs or sneezes and they do not cover it, those droplets can spread about one metre (3ft).
  - **BIN IT** - Disposing of dirty tissues promptly and carefully. Don't pop it back in your pocket to reuse.
  - **KILL IT** - Maintaining good basic hygiene, for example washing hands frequently with soap and water to reduce the spread of the virus from your hands to your face or to other people, especially after sneezing.
  - Cleaning hard surfaces (such as door handles and telephones) frequently using a normal cleaning product.
- If you do become ill, **stay at home** until two days after your acute symptoms have gone – you can get the help you need from the NHS and your flu friends as described in the next section.



## What can I do to prepare in case I catch swine flu?

You should prepare now by:

- Get at least one, and ideally two 'flu friends' – friends and relatives who could help you if you fall ill. They could collect medicines and other supplies for you so you do not have to leave home and possibly spread the virus. (see page 8).
- Make sure you have plenty of paracetamol based cold and cough remedies in your medicine cupboard in case you or your family are affected by swine flu. Please be careful NOT to take paracetamol based cold and cough remedies while also taking ordinary paracetamol.
- If you have a long term condition make sure you have enough medication to last if you become ill and need to stay at home (also see page 12).

## What should I do if I think I'm infected and how can I best care for myself?

The key thing to remember if you think you have swine flu is to **stay at home**.

You should **NOT** go to your GP practice, A&E or your chemist if you suspect you have swine flu. This is because you might spread the illness to others and to help the NHS continue to treat those who need medical care.

If you think you have swine flu, you should:

1. First go online to **www.nhs.uk** and check your symptoms.
2. If you need further advice call the swine flu information line on 0800 1 513 513.
3. If you are still concerned, you should call the National Pandemic Flu Service on 0800 1 513 100 or go online to **www.direct.gov.uk/pandemicflu**. They will confirm whether you need antiviral drugs and if necessary, organise a prescription for collection by your nominated flu friend.

4. Before the launch of the National Pandemic Flu Service, or if you still have further concerns, you can call your GP.
5. If you are prescribed antiviral drugs by your GP, they will let you know the process for collecting them by your flu friend. It is important to complete the prescribed course of treatment.
6. If you feel you have symptoms of swine flu and you feel you may require **urgent** medical attention because of it, telephone your GP. If the surgery is closed follow their instructions for contacting the emergency doctor. **Do not turn up at A&E unannounced as you could expose other people to the infection.**

**If you have swine flu symptoms you should isolate yourself at home and restrict your contact with people.** As with ordinary flu, you should drink lots of fluids, take lots of rest and use standard paracetamol-based cold remedies to reduce your temperature and help relieve symptoms. If possible, keep a small supply of these at home or ask your flu friend to get these for you.

## Get a flu friend

If you have flu like symptoms it is really important that you stay at home to avoid spreading the virus to other people.

If your GP confirms that you have swine flu you may need to take antiviral medicine and the only way to get this is for someone to pick it up on your behalf from a special antiviral collection point. They will need to provide identification for themselves, and identification for you.

Your flu friend could also pick up other flu medicine from a pharmacy for you or any other important provisions. It is really important that you do not turn up to an antiviral collection point with swine flu – you will be turned away and you risk infecting other people.

## What is a flu friend?

It is important to nominate at least one, and ideally two, 'flu friends'.

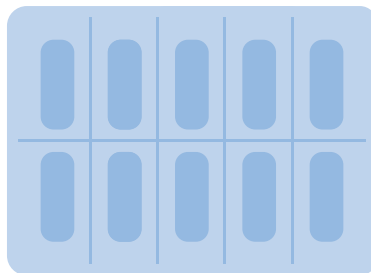
A flu friend should be:

- a friend or relative who does not live at your home (because you may have passed the virus onto them), does not have flu themselves and would help you if you fall ill
- it is recommended that they should be:
  - at least 16 years old
  - have English as their first language
  - be someone you trust as you may need to provide them with your identification. There is a wide range of ID that can be used, they need to include one form with a photo and another with an address. A full list is available on the swine flu section of our website at **[www.bradford.nhs.uk](http://www.bradford.nhs.uk)**.
- they would need to use either public transport, their car or walk to collect medicines and other supplies for you, so you don't have to leave home and possibly spread the virus
- if there is someone you know who lives alone, is elderly or vulnerable maybe you could offer to be their flu friend
- if you don't have a flu friend and need one, please let your GP know or alternatively call 01274 256176.

## What is the treatment for swine flu?

It is important to remember that many people will be able to recover from swine flu without the need for antiviral drugs. If you are not in a higher risk group as described previously and have no underlying medical conditions you probably do not need any antiviral drugs. You can treat yourself at home with over-the-counter paracetamol-based cold remedies, remember to drink plenty of fluids.

Swine flu can be treated with the antiviral medicines Tamiflu® and Relenza®. Ideally take within 48 hours of developing symptoms to be most effective but up to seven days if still symptomatic.



Your GP will have the latest information on current antiviral collection points.

Antiviral drugs are **not** a cure, but they can help you recover by:

- relieving some of the symptoms
- reducing the length of time you are ill by around one day
- reducing the potential for serious complications, such as pneumonia

It is worth remembering though that antiviral drugs, such as Tamiflu®, can have side effects including:

- nausea
- vomiting
- stomach aches

These side effects can be significantly reduced by taking your Tamiflu® with food.

Tamiflu® is in capsules of gelatine, so if you are unable to take gelatine, open the capsule and take the contents with a small spoonful of jam or honey. Please note that it is quite bitter.

## How can I help the NHS care for those who really need their help?

You can help yourself and others by allowing the NHS to deal with more serious illnesses by treating minor ailments yourself. Your pharmacist can also help with minor ailments. Visit the NHS Choices website to find out more about self-care:

[www.nhs.uk/yourhealth/pages/whatissselfcare.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/yourhealth/pages/whatissselfcare.aspx).

# **ABOUT THE SWINE FLU VACCINE**

## **Is there a swine flu vaccine available?**

Yes.

## **About the swine flu vaccine**

Vaccines have been developed to protect against the virus that causes swine flu. There are two different brands of vaccine – Pandemrix and Celvapan. Many people given the Pandemrix vaccine will only need one dose. People who have the Celvapan vaccine will need two doses three weeks apart.

## **Is it the same as the seasonal flu vaccination?**

No. The swine flu vaccine is different from the seasonal flu vaccination that's offered every year. The seasonal flu vaccine does not protect against swine flu. If you are usually advised to have the seasonal flu vaccination, you should have it. You may be offered the swine flu vaccine as well.

**The seasonal flu vaccine does not protect against swine flu.**

## **Who will get the vaccination first?**

The vaccine is being offered first to people who are most likely to become seriously ill if they catch swine flu. These people are in the following priority groups:

- 1. Adults and children over six months of age who have a long-term health condition, including:**
  - Chronic lung disease
  - Chronic heart disease
  - Chronic kidney disease
  - Chronic liver disease
  - Chronic neurological diseases
  - Diabetes mellitus

- Immunosuppression caused by a disease or treatment for a disease. For example, this may include people who do not have a spleen, and people who are on immunosuppressant treatment or are taking high doses of systemic steroids.

## **2. Pregnant women at any stage of pregnancy**

Being pregnant can put you more at risk of being seriously ill if you catch swine flu. So far, evidence suggests that pregnant women are four times more likely to develop serious complications from swine flu and up to five times more likely to need to go to hospital. The risks of flu are highest at the later stages of pregnancy (see page 15).

## **3. People who live in the same house as someone whose immune system is compromised by disease or treatment.**

If you live with someone who is having treatment for cancer, for example, and you catch swine flu, they might catch it from you and become very ill.

If you have a severely compromised immune system, ask the people you live with to think about getting vaccinated to help protect you against catching swine flu. If you are unsure about whether you should be vaccinated, speak to your GP or practice nurse.

**The vaccine is also being offered to health and social care staff who may be in close contact with people in the above groups.**

## **Who can't have the swine flu vaccine?**

There are only a few people who cannot have the swine flu vaccine. The vaccines should not be given to anyone who has had a severe allergic reaction to a previous dose of the vaccine or any component of the vaccine. If you are worried that this may apply to you, talk to your GP or practice nurse.

## **What about people with egg allergies?**

The Pandemrix vaccine is prepared in hens' eggs in the same way that seasonal flu vaccines are. It should not be given to people who have had a confirmed anaphylactic reaction (difficulty breathing, collapse or loss of consciousness) after being exposed to eggs or egg-containing products. The Celvapan vaccine is not prepared using eggs, so you should have this vaccine if you have a severe allergy to eggs.

## **What about everyone else?**

People who aren't in the priority groups listed may be offered the vaccine at a later stage. The Government has ordered enough vaccine for everyone in the country if the situation requires it.

## **What else do I need to know?**

### **Are there any side-effects?**

All vaccinations can produce side-effects such as redness, soreness and swelling at the site of the injection. Flu vaccines can cause symptoms like fever, headache and muscle aches, but they are much milder than the flu itself and only last a day or so.

If you think that you or someone you know has experienced a more serious side-effect to Pandemrix or Celvapan, please report it to the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency at [www.mhra.gov.uk/swineflu](http://www.mhra.gov.uk/swineflu).

**The vaccine is not live and cannot cause swine flu.**

### **But how can I be sure these new vaccines are safe and effective?**

This vaccine has been well-tested and is safe, other than the rare adverse effects associated with all vaccines. It has had to pass stringent tests before being granted a licence by the European Medicines Agency. On top of this extensive trials involving thousands of people have been done on very similar H5N1 flu vaccines. The balance of risks for someone considering swine flu immunisation is strongly in favour of having the vaccine.

### **Do I still need the swine flu vaccine if I've already had swine flu?**

Only the very early cases of swine flu were confirmed by a laboratory test, so most people cannot be certain they have had swine flu. People in the priority groups should still have the vaccine unless they had a positive test for swine flu (sometimes called a throat swab).

## What should I do now?

If you are in one of the priority groups for the swine flu vaccination described on pages 6 and 16, your GP will write to you, inviting you to make an appointment at your surgery.

Not everyone in the country will get their vaccine at exactly the same time, so don't worry if you don't hear from your GP surgery straightaway.

However, if after a few weeks you think you should have received a vaccine and you have not, get in touch with your GP surgery.

Depending on your personal circumstances, and which vaccine you are given, you may require two doses. Your GP will tell you whether you need to make a follow-up appointment for a second dose.

### Why is getting vaccinated a good idea?

Getting vaccinated against swine flu will:

- help protect you against swine flu help protect your family and other people who are close to you – as it is less likely that they will catch the virus from you
- help protect you against future waves of infection caused by the swine flu virus.

## **MORE INFORMATION FOR AT RISK GROUPS**

### **Pregnant women**

#### **Are pregnant women more likely to catch swine flu?**

Yes. Pregnant women are more susceptible to all infections, because their immune system is naturally suppressed in pregnancy. They are especially high risk to swine flu, as this virus is affecting younger age groups in particular.

#### **Does swine flu pose special risks in pregnant women?**

Pregnant women have an increased risk of complications from any type of flu. Possible complications are pneumonia (an infection of the lungs), difficulty breathing and dehydration, which are more likely to happen in the second and third trimester.

There is a chance that these complications could lead to premature labour or miscarriage. We don't yet have enough information to know how likely these risks are. It is therefore important to take antiviral medication as soon as swine flu symptoms start, as this can reduce the length of time you are ill and reduce the potential for such complications.

#### **Can I take antiviral drugs if I am pregnant?**

Yes, on the advice of a doctor. Relenza®, (an inhaled antiviral drug that treats flu without reaching the developing foetus) is currently recommended for use in pregnancy in the UK.

An expert group has reviewed the risk of antiviral treatment in pregnancy, which is extremely small – much smaller than the risk posed by the symptoms of swine flu.

## **Should I stop breastfeeding if I need to take antiviral drugs?**

Antiviral drugs are excreted into breast milk in very small (insignificant) amounts. Women who are breastfeeding should therefore continue to do so while receiving antiviral treatment. If a mother is ill, she should continue breastfeeding and increase feeding frequency. If she becomes too ill to feed, then expressing milk might still be possible.

## **Children and babies**

### **Can children take antiviral drugs?**

Yes, on the advice of a doctor. Tamiflu® is safe for infants aged one and older, at a reduced dose. Relenza® (an inhaler) can be used by children aged five and older under the supervision of an adult.

### **Can babies under the age of one take antiviral drugs?**

Children under one can be treated with Tamiflu®, as long as they are treated under medical supervision.

## **Higher risk people with certain long term conditions**

It is essential for these groups to get early medical advice if they develop swine flu symptoms.

If a member of your household is diagnosed with swine flu, you might wish to talk to your GP for further advice.

It is particularly important to make sure that you have an adequate supply of your usual medication. Don't wait till you have run out. Contact your local pharmacy to arrange to pick up your repeat prescriptions in good time as they may be extra busy at this time.

## **Long term lung disease (including asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and cystic fibrosis)**

You are no more likely to catch swine flu than anyone else. However, if you do catch a respiratory infection, including swine flu, it can add to the breathing difficulties you may have.

Tamiflu® is safe to take. Relenza® (an inhaler) is usually not given to people with asthma as on rare occasions it can cause breathing complications.

## **Diabetes**

You are no more likely to catch swine flu than anyone else. If you do catch it, however, your blood glucose might increase and your diabetes treatment might need to be adjusted accordingly. If you start to vomit or become unwell, then contact your GP as soon as possible.

## **Liver disease**

If you have liver disease you are no more likely to catch swine flu than anyone else. If you do catch it, antiviral drugs are safe to take – there is no interaction between these and antiviral drugs you may already be taking to treat hepatitis.

## **Epilepsy**

Antiviral treatments are not thought to affect medicines taken to control epilepsy.

## **Immunosuppressed people (caused by disease or treatment)**

If you take medication or have an illness that suppresses your immunity you have a greater risk of becoming infected with any virus, including swine flu, and will be less able to fight it off once you have it. On the advice of a doctor it is safe for you to take Tamiflu® or Relenza®.

## **Kidney disease**

If you have severe kidney disease or are under the care of a kidney specialist, Relenza® may be a safer antiviral for you than Tamiflu®. Your doctor will advise on which one is best for you.

## **Chronic heart disease, neurological disease, sickle cell disease**

You are no more likely to catch swine flu than anyone else. However, if you do catch it you need to seek medical advice early.

## **Older people**

Most cases so far in the UK have been in those younger than 60. It is thought that some older people might have partial resistance to the swine flu virus, due to being exposed to a similar flu virus in a previous pandemic. Older and frail people are, however, more likely to develop complications from any type of flu, and are generally less able to fight it off; so if they develop swine flu symptoms they need to seek medical help early.

## **Carers**

### **I look after someone who is very ill or disabled. What if I become too ill to care for them?**

As a carer, you should probably begin planning for an emergency caring situation as soon as possible. We suggest you talk to family, friends and neighbours and form a network of 'flu friends' so that you and the person you care for are looked after.

Think about:

- What if you get flu?
- What if the person you care for gets flu?
- What if your home care worker, nurse or other carer cannot come to work?
- What if the day centres close?

For other information and advice please call Carers Direct, a national 24 hour helpline for unpaid carers on 0808 8020202 [www.nhs.uk/carersdirect](http://www.nhs.uk/carersdirect).

## **USEFUL CONTACTS**

Flu symptom checker - [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

Swine flu information line - 0800 1 513 513

National Pandemic Flu Service – 0800 1 513 100  
[www.direct.gov.uk/pandemicflu](http://www.direct.gov.uk/pandemicflu)

NHS Direct - 0845 46 47 [www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk/swineflu](http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk/swineflu)

Your GP

Carers Direct - Tel: 0808 8020202

NHS Bradford and Airedale Web site - [www.bradford.nhs.uk](http://www.bradford.nhs.uk)

Department of Health - [www.dh.gov.uk](http://www.dh.gov.uk)

Health Protection Agency: [www.hpa.org.uk](http://www.hpa.org.uk)

### **Sources for material:**

NHS Choices

Health Protection Agency

Department of Health

NHS Direct

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### **Date:**

November 2009

The information in this leaflet was correct at the above date.  
To keep up-to-date with any further changes, please check the  
above websites or **[www.bradford.nhs.uk](http://www.bradford.nhs.uk)**

# **NATIONAL PANDEMIC FLU SERVICE**

[www.direct.gov.uk/pandemicflu](http://www.direct.gov.uk/pandemicflu)

**INFORMATION 0800 1 513 513**

**TREATMENT 0800 1 513 100**

Calls to this number are free from UK landlines and most mobiles.  
If English is not your first language, you may need help from someone  
who speaks English to use it.

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[www.bradford.nhs.uk](http://www.bradford.nhs.uk)

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