



RoodlaneMedical

Swine Flu – Frequently Asked Questions

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Q1: What should I do if I am returning from a country where "swine flu" (Human Influenza Type A H1 / N1) has been reported?

A1: The only countries for which special precautions currently apply are the USA (New York, Texas, California) and Mexico. If you are returning from one of these destinations then you should stay at home for 7 days. The incubation period for flu is short (1-3 days) and this period will be sufficient. If you are well at the end of this period then you may safely return to the office. Current advice is that you should only take anti-flu medicine if you are experiencing symptoms (and not in case you get H1/N1 or to stop it developing).

Q2: What should I do if I feel that I have a flu like illness?

A2: At the current level of alert (4), you should speak to your usual doctor by telephone or discuss with NHS Direct. If you have symptoms of the flu such as fever ≥ 38 degrees PLUS cough / sore throat / body aches / headache AND have returned from a high risk geographical area then you will be recommended to be tested for A H1/N1 flu and you will be given treatment straight away. Results take 6 to 8 hours to come back and are done on a named patient basis by the Health Protection Agency (HPA). This will all be co-ordinated with your doctor.

Q3: If I don't meet the criteria in Q2 can I still have a test "to be safe"?

A3: Testing is on a named patient basis only and is conducted by the HPA and is not being offered at other laboratories.

Q4: I am travelling to the US / Mexico and would like to take some Tamiflu / Relenza antiviral medicine with me - can I get this from my doctor?

A4: The current advice is that these drugs should only be used where clinical and geographical criteria are met (see A1 and A2). Some doctors may be prepared to issue a prescription and you may still be able to get a pharmacist to issue this. However, stocks in pharmacies are being depleted and it will be increasingly more difficult to get anti-flu medicines in this way.

Q5: I have been in contact with clients / colleagues who have returned from Mexico / US, are visiting from Mexico / US, what should I do?

A5: If these individuals are well then they are unlikely to pose a risk as the incubation for flu is short and flu infection will soon be apparent in visitors and returning travellers. If visitors or returning travellers are unwell then they should be assessed as in A2 and the appropriate steps taken. If H1 / N1 is confirmed then the HPA will contact you and take swabs to see if you are developing flu. You will be treated if this is the case.

Q6: I have a flu vaccine every year, will that protect me?

A6: There is theoretically a very small protective effect as some of the seasonal viral serotypes share common characteristics to the current H1N1 strain. However, you are NOT recommended to have a flu vaccine at present as this is unlikely to confer significant benefit. There is NO vaccine to A H1 N1.

Q7: What are the antiviral drugs Relenza and Tamiflu / Tamivir and how are they given?

A7: These drugs are *neuraminidase inhibitors* which means they block the neuraminidase enzyme (chemical) which is an important way in which the virus infects its host. The "N" in H1/ N1 stands for neuraminidase. Tamiflu / Tamivir is administered in capsule form (or as an oral suspension for children) which is taken once or twice a day depending on the required dose. Relenza is administered as dry powder via an inhaler device which is used once or twice a day depending on the required dose. They are generally very safe and well tolerated although people with severe asthma may have to exercise caution when they start to take these drugs.

Q8: Should I wear a face mask?

A8: There is no evidence to suggest that wearing a face mask offers any additional protection. The best way to combat transmission of flu virus is scrupulous hand hygiene - this means washing your hands or using a proprietary antiviral hand cleanser (e.g. alcohol-based wipe or gel) after touching hard surfaces such as door handles and "hot desks" / travelling on public transport.

If you require further information then please contact Hannah Hawkins at Roodlane Medical (hannah.hawkins@roodlane.co.uk).