

Prevention of the Swine Flu Virus in Athletics

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) states that Swine Influenza (swine flu) is a respiratory disease of pigs caused by type A influenza virus that regularly causes outbreaks of influenza in pigs. Like all influenza viruses, swine flu viruses change constantly. Because of this mutation or changing of the virus, humans are able to contract this strain of the virus. In the past, CDC received reports of approximately one human swine influenza virus infection every one to two years in the U.S., but from December 2005 through February 2009, 12 cases of human infection with swine influenza have been reported. Since April, it has become a worldwide pandemic.

It can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death. The flu is different from a cold and usually comes on suddenly. The symptoms below are usually referred to as “flu-like symptoms.”

- ***Fever**- greater than 100 degrees without the use of Tylenol or Motrin products
- ***Headache**
- ***Extreme tiredness**
- ***Dry cough**
- ***Sore throat**
- ***Runny or stuffy nose**
- ***Muscle aches**
- ***Stomach symptoms**, such as nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea, also can occur but are more common in children than adults

As people come into contact with human flu year after year, we build antibodies to the ever changing flu viruses. These antibodies help our bodies fight an infection. The swine flu is more contagious because we have not built up any antibodies to this animal strain and our main defense to continue with the simple things that keep our immune systems strong. The symptoms are usually mild but become serious in people who have other medical problems.

Swine flu is transmitted the same way as seasonal flu, which is mainly person-to-person transmission through coughing or sneezing of people infected with the influenza virus. People may become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose. People **cannot** contract swine flu by eating pork.

New studies show that many people with swine flu may be able to spread the virus for a week or more after symptoms first appear. That’s longer than some experts had thought. The new research suggests they may need to be careful for longer, and that coughing is a more accurate sign of how long they can spread the virus.

Athletes are at risk for several reasons. The nature of athletic participation is to push the body to the limit, which causes dehydration and a compromised immune system. Recovery should consist of ample rest, rehydration and refueling with a balanced, nutritious diet to boost the immune system. Easy as this may seem, most athletes do not follow these simple rules to restore their bodies and prevent or reduce disease. Athletes also share dressing rooms, personal equipment, weight rooms and weight equipment as well as footballs, basketballs, volleyballs or soccer balls.

A few things to remember on when participating in sports:

- **Practice good hand hygiene** by washing your hands with **soap and water** for 30 seconds, especially after coughing or sneezing. Use a clean disposable towel to turn off the faucet. Use **hand sanitizer**, when soap and water is not available. Use frequently during practice and competition.
- **Practice respiratory etiquette** by covering your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Discard the tissue after it has been used. Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way. **When on the field or if tissue is not available**, cough into shoulder or inside sleeve. If you have a runny nose, only use a tissue. Carry tissues and hand sanitizer in gym bags.
- **Know the signs and symptoms of the flu.** Fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. A number of people who have been infected with the H1N1 flu virus also have reported diarrhea and vomiting.
- **Do not share water bottles.** Bring water bottles from home to be used on the field. Make sure that they are washed every night in warm soapy water. In sports situations where shared drinking container is used, do not put mouth on the spout/spigot. Teams should make sure that it is cleaned and aired out over night.
- **Stay home if you have flu or flu-like illness.** Do not return to school or practice for at least 24 hours after you no longer have a fever (100 degrees Fahrenheit or 38 degrees Celsius or greater) or signs of a fever (chills, feel warm to the touch, flushed appearance or sweating), without the use of Tylenol and Motrin products. Limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.

If you show flu like symptoms, you may think you want to tough it out and play with a fever but remember, you will be infecting your team mates. It's not worth the risk!

For more information:

Center for Disease Control <http://www.cdc.gov/>

National Center for Sports Safety <http://www.sportssafety.org/>