

Swine flu questions and answers

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What is swine flu?

Swine Influenza is a respiratory disease of pigs caused by type A influenza viruses. Outbreaks of swine influenza happen regularly in pigs. People do not normally get swine flu, but human infections can and do happen. Most commonly, cases happen in people who are around pigs but it's possible for swine influenza viruses to spread from person to person also.

What are the symptoms of swine influenza?

The symptoms of swine influenza in people are similar to the symptoms of regular human seasonal influenza infection and include fever, fatigue, lack of appetite, coughing and sore throat. Some people with swine flu have also reported vomiting and diarrhoea.

Which people are most vulnerable from swine flu?

Those who are more at risk from becoming seriously ill with swine flu are: people with chronic lung disease, including people who have had drug treatment for their asthma within the past three years,

- people with chronic heart disease,
- people with chronic kidney disease,
- people with chronic liver disease,
- people with chronic neurological disease (neurological disorders include motor neurone disease, Parkinson's disease and multiple sclerosis),
- people with suppressed immune systems (whether caused by disease or treatment),
- people with diabetes,
- pregnant women,
- people aged 65 years and older, and
- young children under five years old.

For specific advice on antiviral treatment for these groups, go to [People with long-term conditions](#), [Pregnancy and children](#) and [Older people](#).

How is swine flu infection diagnosed?

Diagnosis of swine flu is now based on an assessment of the person's symptoms, rather than having to wait for a swab test result. Health professionals will continue to test some patients to ensure they keep getting up-to-date information about the virus.

Is the new swine flu virus contagious?

The Health Protection Agency (HPA) says the new swine flu virus is highly contagious and is spreading from person to person. Swine flu spreads in the

same way as ordinary colds and flu. The virus is spread through the droplets that come out of the nose or mouth when someone coughs or sneezes. If someone coughs or sneezes and they do not cover it, those droplets can spread about one metre (3ft). If you are very close to the person you might breathe them in.

Or, if someone coughs or sneezes into their hand, those droplets and the virus within them are easily transferred to surfaces that the person touches, such as door handles, hand rails, telephones and keyboards. If you touch these surfaces and touch your face, the virus can enter your system, and you can become infected. [See Causes for more information](#)

How long does the virus live on surfaces?

The flu virus can live on a hard surface for up to 24 hours, and a soft surface for around 20 minutes.

What is the incubation period for swine flu?

According to the Health Protection Agency, the incubation period for swine flu (time between infection and appearance of symptoms) can be up to seven days, but is most likely to be between two and five days. It is, however, too early to be able to provide details on virus characteristics, including incubation period, with absolute certainty at this time.

When are people most infectious?

People are most infectious to others soon after they develop symptoms, although they continue to shed the virus (for example, in coughs and sneezes) for up to five days (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.

How quickly is swine flu spreading?

Swine flu is now widespread in the UK and spreading rapidly. The number of new cases in the UK is doubling every seven days. Most of these are because people are catching swine flu in their local community and not as the result of foreign travel. Go to the [Latest on swine flu](#) for a current list of all the countries affected by swine flu.

Should I avoid contact with people suspected of having swine flu?

All suspected cases who have swine flu symptoms will have been asked to self-isolate at home and restrict their contact with people. The vast majority of people should go about their normal activities, including going to school or work. This includes children who attend a school with a confirmed case of swine flu.

There is no need on risk grounds to avoid contact with people who might simply have come into contact with those having the illness, such as the parents of children at schools with a confirmed case but who are not themselves ill.

How dangerous is it?

It is difficult to judge this at the moment. While there have been deaths, symptoms exhibited by most infected people have not been severe. It appears that early doses of antiviral medicines such as Tamiflu are effective in helping people to recover. In the UK we have enough antivirals to treat half the population if they were to become ill. Also, orders of Tamiflu have been placed to increase UK supplies to 50m doses, enough to treat 80% of the population.

Should I go to work or school if I have been in contact with someone who I know has swine flu?

Yes, as long as you do not have flu-like symptoms. If you are feeling well, you should go about your normal activities, including going to school or work. It can take up to seven days (normally two to five days) after infection for swine flu symptoms to develop. If you develop symptoms, stay at home and follow the general advice (see [What should I do if I think I'm infected?](#)).

Is it possible to catch swine flu twice?

Yes, because the virus can mutate (change). If you become infected with the swine flu virus, your body produces antibodies against it, which will recognise and fight off the virus if the body ever encounters it again. However, if the virus mutates, your immune system may not recognise this different strain and you may become ill again, although you may have some 'cross protection' due to encountering a similar virus previously.

Should I have a 'swine flu party' or try and catch swine flu now, so I will be immune to more serious strains that may emerge later?

No – it is irresponsible to purposefully catch the virus as you may perpetuate the spread. Also, as we don't yet know the profile of the virus, it is too soon to assume it is only a mild infection. And catching swine flu will not necessarily protect you from strains that may emerge later (see [Is it possible to catch swine flu twice?](#)).

What should I do if I have flu like symptoms?

If people think they have swine flu they should stay at home, go online and check symptoms on www.nhs.uk or call the swine flu information line on 0800 1513513.

If still concerned, people should then call the national flu service on 0800 1 513 100, who will make an assessment and may issue a unique antiviral authorisation number for the patient's flu friend to collect a course of antiviral medicine. Callers will need to give details of symptoms and medical history and will need pen and paper to jot down instructions. NHS Herefordshire has stressed that people should not go to the accident and emergency unit or their GP surgery if they suspect they have swine flu, unless they are advised to do so by a healthcare professional.

How does the national flu line work?

People diagnosed by the national flu line will be given an authorisation number that a 'flu friend' – a friend or relative who does not have swine flu – can use to pick up antiviral medicine from one of the local pharmacies stocking antiviral medicine. The national flu line means that people will not need to consult a doctor and it will help take away some of the pressure from GP practices.

NHS Herefordshire has been provided by the government with significant stocks of antiviral medicine. Six key pharmacies in Hereford and in the market towns have been supplied with stocks where flu friends will be able to take an authorisation number to collect antiviral medicine.

People should now have made sure that have a healthy friend or relative, who is a nominated 'flu friend'. Communities are asked to please check up on neighbours who may be elderly or vulnerable to ensure they have someone who can take an authorisation number to the pharmacy to pick up the treatment. Flu friends will be asked for proof of their own and the patient's identity.

Pharmacies will dispense antiviral medicines only if they are presented with appropriate authorisation, and they will also provide advice on the use of the medicines. No prescription charges will be made.

Is Herefordshire setting up antiviral collection points?

Herefordshire has a comparatively small number of diagnosed cases, although swine flu is spreading in the community. If demand increases beyond the capacity of the community pharmacies, NHS Herefordshire has plans in place to open special collection points in the county to distribute antiviral medicines for up to 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Over 500 council and primary care trust staff have come forward to be redeployed to the antiviral collection points if this proves necessary. The county is also geared

up to launch its own flu helpline if required, but currently neither that nor special antiviral collection points are deemed necessary.

How many confirmed cases of swine flu are there in Herefordshire?

NHS Herefordshire and Herefordshire Council confirm that as predicted, there has been a rapid increase in the numbers of diagnosis of swine flu in Herefordshire by local GPs. A Public Health Incident Team has been formed out of Local Resilience Forum with partner agencies across the county. We are working with the Health Protection Agency to monitor the situation in Herefordshire and we are sending our regular updates to the community and posting them on the council and primary care trust web sites.

How well is Herefordshire prepared for a pandemic?

In Herefordshire we have been working for some years to ensure we have well tested plans to manage flu outbreaks and local agencies are prepared for a pandemic should it be declared by the World Health Organisation. We are assessing the situation regularly and closely and we will keep you informed through regular updates on the council and primary care trust websites. All households in Herefordshire should have received a nationally distributed Swine Flu Information Leaflet, which contains information about what swine flu is and how it could spread, what the UK government has done to prepare for a wider outbreak of flu, how you can protect yourself against flu and what to do if you have flu symptoms. This leaflet is also available on the [Department of Health website](#)

What can I do?

You can reduce, but not eliminate, the risk of catching or spreading swine flu by:

- Always covering your nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing.
- Disposing of dirty tissues promptly and carefully.
- Maintaining good basic hygiene, for example washing hands frequently with soap and warm water to reduce the spread of the virus from your hands to face, or to other people.
- Cleaning hard surfaces, such as door handles, frequently using a normal cleaning product.

You should also prepare now by:

- **Confirming a network of '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.
- **Knowing your NHS number and those of other family members** and keeping them in a safe place. It is not essential to have your NHS

number in order to receive treatment, but it can help NHS staff to find your health records. You will be able to find your NHS Number on your medical card or other items such as prescribed medication, GP letter or hospital appointment card/letter.

- **Making sure you have a thermometer and adequate quantities of cold and cough remedies** in your medicine cupboard in case you or your family are affected by swine flu.

Is it safe to eat pork?

Swine influenza viruses are not transmitted by food. You cannot get swine influenza from eating pork or pork products. Eating properly handled and cooked pork and pork products is safe.

Who is at risk?

Swine flu is a new virus so no-one will have immunity to it and everyone could be at risk of catching it. This includes healthy adults as well as older people and children.

What is the difference between ordinary flu and pandemic flu?

Pandemic flu occurs when an influenza virus emerges that is so different from previously circulating strains that few, if any, people have any immunity to it. This allows it to spread widely and rapidly, causing serious illness. Pandemic flu occurs during any season, affects more people than ordinary flu (up to half the population), is a more serious infection, and people of all ages may be at risk of infection. Ordinary flu occurs every year during the winter and affects 10 to 15 per cent of the UK population. Most people recover within 1 or 2 weeks without medical treatment. It can be identified in advance and a vaccine can be made (this immunisation is known as the flu jab and helps protect people from ordinary flu).

Should I go out and buy facemasks for me and my family?

There is no conclusive evidence that facemasks protect healthy people in their day-to-day lives. In fact if used incorrectly, masks may even expose people to infection. We know the virus is spread by picking up the virus from touching infected surfaces, or by someone coughing or sneezing at very close range - so unless you're standing close to someone with the virus, wearing a facemask won't make a difference. Instead, we want people to focus on good hand hygiene, staying at home if they're feeling unwell with flu like symptoms, and covering their mouth when they cough or sneeze. These are simple, proven ways of protecting yourself and others from infection.

Who should be wearing a facemask?

The Health Protection Agency recommends that healthcare workers should wear a facemask if they come into close contact (within a metre) with

symptomatic individuals to reduce their risk of catching the virus from patients. However, the HPA does not recommend that healthy people wear facemasks to go about their everyday business.

Why are we saying health professionals should wear facemasks and not other public sector workers?

Healthcare workers will be at increased risk during any pandemic because they are likely to have close and frequent contact with infectious patients while providing vital care. Patients who need the attention of a doctor or nurse, especially those admitted to hospital are likely to be those who are more severely ill. They shed greater quantities of virus and this may increase the risk of transmission.

Is swine flu treatable?

Testing has shown that the swine flu can be treated with the antiviral medicines oseltamavir (brand name Tamiflu) and zanamivir (Relenza). However, the drugs must be administered at an early stage to be effective. See [Treatment](#) for more information

The UK already has a stockpile of antivirals sufficient to treat half the population. Also, orders of Tamiflu have been placed to increase UK supplies to 50m doses, enough to treat 80% of the population.

What do antivirals do?

Antivirals are not a cure, but they help you to recover by:

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

How large is the UK's stockpile of antivirals?

The government has 23 million treatments of Tamiflu and 10.5 million treatments of Relenza. Orders of Tamiflu have been placed to increase UK supplies to 50m doses, enough to treat 80% of the population.

Is one of the antivirals more appropriate for pregnant women and people with certain kidney conditions?

Relenza is an inhaled drug that will be used for pregnant women and people with certain kidney conditions who are unable to take Tamiflu.

Will antivirals be given to people without flu symptoms?

In most cases, no - the virus is now widespread and it is no longer appropriate to try and contain the spread of the illness. Antivirals will generally only be given, at a doctor's discretion, to people who have been diagnosed with swine

flu. Doctors should not offer antiviral medication as prophylaxis (prevention) to contacts of cases unless, for example, a household member has serious underlying health problems or there are other special circumstances.

Will my child experience nausea if they take Tamiflu?

As is the case with many medicines, nausea is a known side effect of Tamiflu, in a small number of cases. Symptoms may lessen over the course of the treatment. It may help to take Tamiflu either with or immediately after food, and drinking some water may also lessen any feelings of nausea.

How are those with confirmed swine flu getting access to antivirals?

If antivirals are required, the person's GP will give them a voucher reference number over the phone (see [How is swine flu infection diagnosed](#)).

A healthy friend or relative can then use this to pick up antivirals from the person's local collection centre - usually a pharmacy or community centre.

Should people be stockpiling their own antivirals?

No. The government has a stockpile of antivirals sufficient to treat half the population, and is taking steps to increase this to cover 80% as an extra precaution. Therefore, antivirals should be available for everyone who gets ill in the pandemic and there is no need for people to buy their own.

Does Tamiflu go out of date?

The government has a programme to replace any expired doses under a 'rolling stock' system.

If I take an antiviral and have side effects, whom should I inform?

First, see your healthcare professional to check that you are ok. Then, report your suspected drug reaction to the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) via their [new online system](#) (links to external site). This new webpage, based on the Yellow Card Scheme, helps the MHRA to monitor the safety of Tamiflu and Relenza. Anyone who does not have access to the internet can ask their healthcare provider to send a report on their behalf.

When will there be a vaccine?

Vaccines are complex and difficult to manufacture in large numbers. However, the Government has already signed contracts to get enough vaccine for the entire country as soon as it is available. While the first batches of vaccine will start to arrive in the autumn it will take several months to get

enough vaccine for everyone. It will also take time to fully test the vaccine and to organise the vaccination of everyone in the country. To reduce the impact of swine flu, the NHS is focusing on those at the greatest risk first.

Why does it take several months to produce a swine flu vaccine?

The flu vaccine production process is long and complicated. Production technology is labour-intensive. The government's plans include two manufacturers, thus maximising chances of early development. If other countries are also being given advance supply guarantees, will we get ours first? The UK has a binding contractual agreement in place to ensure its supply.

Does the current seasonal flu vaccine work?

The current seasonal flu vaccine is designed to protect against H1N1, but it is unclear as yet whether this will offer any protection against the current strain of swine flu.

How many stocks are available of seasonal vaccine?

Flu vaccine is produced each year for the seasonal flu. Discussions are ongoing with manufacturers about how much may still be available. However, the government has determined that there are 430,000 doses of vaccine available in the UK.

Who will be a priority for vaccination with the H1N1 swine flu vaccine?

The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation has previously advised that the priority groups in relation to H5N1 (the bird flu vaccine) should be assumed to be:

- frontline health and social care workers (to help ensure the NHS functions well),
- older people and those in clinical risk groups (see [Which people are most vulnerable from swine flu?](#)), as flu can be more serious in these groups, and
- under-16s, as protecting children can slow the spread of the virus in the population.

The priority groups would be reviewed in light of evidence on the virulence and severity of the new virus in different groups. The government will still aim to achieve universal vaccination, but because the vaccine will have to be delivered over time, it is right that we start thinking now about groups to be prioritised.

Will the vaccine still provide people with protection if the swine flu virus mutates between now and the autumn?

At this stage, it is impossible to predict if or how the H1N1 swine flu virus will mutate. However, experiences with the H5N1 vaccine (bird flu vaccine) would suggest that an H1N1 vaccine (produced using the same processes) would also provide a high level of immunity against closely related strains. The level of cross-protection is expected to be greatest for more closely related strains.

Does the NHS have enough syringes to administer the swine flu vaccine?

Yes, orders have been placed to ensure there are enough syringes to administer the vaccine.

What extra antibiotics have been purchased?

Orders have been placed for 15.2m courses of antibiotics. They will play an important part in the response to the pandemic. While antivirals may reduce the number of complications, there are still likely to be significant numbers of complications occurring in the pandemic. Some of the most common include bacterial infections in the respiratory tract and lungs, such as pneumonia. Antibiotics are needed to treat such complications.

Antibiotics will be used to treat people in the community if they develop complications. In hospitals, antibiotics will be used to treat the sickest patients and may reduce the length of hospitalisation.

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 vulnerable to swine flu, as this virus is affecting younger age groups in particular.

Does swine flu pose special risks in pregnant women?

Most pregnant women with swine flu will only have mild symptoms like most other people with swine flu. However, pregnant women have an increased risk of complications from any type of flu, because their immune system is naturally suppressed in pregnancy. 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 small chance that these complications will lead to premature labour or miscarriage. There is not yet enough information to know precisely how likely these birth risks are.

What special precautions can pregnant women take?

If you are pregnant, you can reduce your risk of infection by avoiding unnecessary travel and avoiding crowds where possible. Pregnant women should also follow the general hygiene advice. If a family member or other close contact has swine flu, your doctor may prescribe you antiviral medication (usually Relenza) as a preventative (prophylactic) measure. Relenza is taken through an inhaler rather than a tablet. This means it builds up in your throat and lungs but not in your blood or placenta and should not affect your baby.

If you think that you may have swine flu, check your symptoms online. If you are still concerned, call your doctor for an assessment immediately. If your doctor confirms swine flu over the phone, you will be prescribed antiviral medication to take as soon as possible.

Unless you have swine flu symptoms, carry on attending your antenatal appointments so you can monitor the progress of your pregnancy.

Can I take antiviral drugs if I am pregnant?

Yes, on the advice of a doctor. The Department of Health has purchased Relenza, an inhaled antiviral drug that treats flu without reaching the developing fetus. Relenza should not affect your pregnancy or your growing baby. However, if your doctor or midwifery specialist thinks that a different medicine is needed (for instance, if you have unusually severe flu), you will be given Tamiflu instead. An expert group reviewed the risk of antiviral treatment in pregnancy, which is extremely small - much smaller than the risk posed by the symptoms of swine flu.

What are the possible side effects of Relenza?

Some people have had wheezing or serious breathing problems when they have used Relenza. Relenza is therefore not recommended for people with asthma or COPD. Other possible [side effects](#) include headaches, diarrhoea, nausea and vomiting.

If you take an antiviral and have side effects, see your healthcare professional to check that you are ok. Then report your suspected drug reaction to the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) via their new [new online system](#).

Can I take flu remedies or painkillers if I am pregnant?

You can take paracetamol-base cold remedies to reduce fever and other symptoms. Paracetamol is safe to take in pregnancy. However, pregnant women should not take non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) such as ibuprofen (Nurofen).

Will pregnant women get preference for a swine flu vaccine?

It will be in the autumn before a swine flu vaccine becomes available. When it is available, there will be guidelines on which groups of people are a greater priority for vaccination.

The Royal College of Midwives have released advice on swine flu and pregnancy: <http://www.rcm.org.uk/college/media-centre/press-releases/rcog-rcm-statement-advice-on-swine-flu-and-pregnancy/>

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

Women who are breastfeeding should continue to do so while receiving antiviral treatment, as this is not contraindicated. If a mother is ill, she should continue breastfeeding and increase feeding frequency. If she becomes too ill to feed, then expressing milk may still be possible. Antiviral drugs are excreted into breast milk in very small (insignificant) amounts.

How do I tell if my child has swine flu?

Call your GP immediately if your child has any of the following symptoms AND a temperature of 38°C and above or feels hot: tiredness, headache, runny nose and sneezing, sore throat, shortness of breath, loss of appetite, vomiting and diarrhoea, or aching muscles, limb and joint pain.

Of course, if you are worried about your child you should always call your GP for advice.

One thing you can do right now is to make sure you have a digital thermometer to take your child's temperature.

If my child has swine flu, what should I do?

If your GP confirms that your child has swine flu, they should stay at home and you should treat their symptoms like any other cold or flu. Make sure they drink plenty of liquids, get lots of rest and take over-the-counter cold and flu remedies to help control their temperature.

Your GP will tell you whether your child should also take antiviral drugs. Antivirals, such as Tamiflu, shorten the symptoms by about a day and can reduce the risk of complications. Antivirals are only effective if taken within 48 hours of symptoms starting. If you are worried about your child, do not delay, call your GP immediately.

However, antivirals can also have [side effects](#). If your child's swine flu symptoms are mild, you may not wish to give them antivirals. Your GP can advise you on this.

Can children take antivirals?

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 antivirals?

Tamiflu and Relenza are not licensed for use in babies under the age of one. However, after evaluating all the available evidence, the European Medicines Agency has advised that children under one may be treated with Tamiflu, considering that:

- the appropriate dosage to treat children aged under one is 2-3mg/kg twice daily for five days,
- children are preferably treated under medical supervision, and
- dilution of the capsule content can be used to prepare the dose.

Can my baby take Tamiflu as a preventative measure?

The balance of benefit and risk for using Tamiflu for the prophylaxis (prevention) of swine flu in babies who are not suffering from flu symptoms is not clear. A decision on whether this is recommended should be taken by an expert in the care of young children. The recommended course for prevention in the under-ones is 2mg/kg once a day for 10 days (but should not exceed 10 days). The first line of protection for babies aged under one is respiratory and hand hygiene and frequent cleaning of surfaces, toys and equipment.

How do I get antiviral drugs for my child?

If you decide that your child should take antivirals, your GP will give you an authorisation code. Then ask a 'flu friend' – a friend or relative who does not have swine flu – to take this code to one of your local antiviral collection points to pick up their antivirals. Your GP will tell you where these are.

Will children be first in line for the vaccine?

Scientists and doctors are still testing the vaccine and studying the swine flu virus. When the vaccine becomes available, the NHS will prioritise those who need to get it first.

Are older people more at risk of complications if they do catch it?

Older and frail people are more likely to develop complications from any type of flu, and are generally less able to fight it off.

What advice is being given to travellers?

Before travelling, they should check the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) website for information specific to the country they are visiting (see Useful links). Those who do not have internet access can call the FCO's 24-hour advice line on 0845 850 2829.

We are about to go on holiday, what should we do?

Wherever you go on holiday, you should always take the same sensible precautions that you do when at home. Know where you can get medical advice if you or your family feel unwell and make sure you have over-the-counter medication for coughs and sneezes.

If you are going on holiday in the UK then you can contact the local GP surgery or, when it is available, call the National Pandemic Flu Service helpline.

If you are travelling to Europe, make sure you have your free European Health Insurance Card (EHIC). This entitles you to any necessary medical treatment, including for swine flu, during a visit to another European Economic Area country. You can get an EHIC application form from the Post Office or by calling 0845 606 2030. You can also [apply online](#).

If you have swine flu, do not travel until after your symptoms have stopped. Whenever you go abroad, always check the latest travel advice from the Foreign Office at: www.fco.gov.uk.

What advice are you giving to people with flu who want to travel by plane?

The Health Protection Agency is advising anyone in the UK who is symptomatic not to travel until they are no longer infectious. Similarly, any British nationals abroad with flu who want to fly home should only travel when they are no longer infectious.

What if British nationals abroad ignore this advice and try to travel anyway - won't they be putting other passengers at risk?

It is the discretion of the airline whether to carry a person with signs or symptoms of infectious disease. Any British national prevented from boarding flights when trying to return home from abroad can seek Consular advice from their nearest Diplomatic mission.

Will people be screened when they arrive at their destination?

The [Foreign and Commonwealth Office website](#) states that medical screening for the swine flu virus has been introduced at several airports for passengers arriving on international flights, including in China. In the section on China, the guidance states: 'The Chinese government continues to place great emphasis on screening and surveillance, rapid detection, quarantine and treatment.'

What should I do if I become ill on holiday or on the flight home?

Make sure you check in advance so you know where you can get medical advice if you or your family feel unwell on holiday. And make sure you have over-the-counter medication for flu, such as paracetamol or ibuprofen. Remember that children should not take aspirin.

If you are travelling to Europe, make sure you have your free European Health Insurance Card (EHIC). This entitles you to any necessary medical treatment, including for swine flu, during a visit to another European Economic Area country. You can get an EHIC application form from the post office, by calling 0845 606 2030, or by [applying online](#).

If you do experience flu-like symptoms, keep away from public places to avoid spreading it. Then contact a health professional and tell them your symptoms. If you become ill on your flight home, alert the cabin crew to your symptoms. There are procedures in place for dealing with passengers who become unwell on flights, and the airline will advise port health officials on the ground that a passenger requires a health assessment and may need treatment.

To access the Department of Health Swine Flu Information line when abroad, call 00 44 207 928 1010.

Will GPs have to certify people as having swine flu for travel insurance purposes?

The [Association of British Insurers](#) (ABI) has confirmed that swine flu will be treated no differently from any other illness by travel insurers. People diagnosed with swine flu before they are due to travel abroad, and any immediate family members (spouse, parents and children, with some policies covering other relatives) due to travel with them, will be covered for the cost of holiday cancellation by their travel insurance.

Insurers usually require a doctor's certificate to confirm that the patient was unable to travel. The government welcomes the comments from the ABI that they would expect insurers to be flexible on the time it takes to obtain such a certificate and that they are considering what other forms of evidence might be acceptable.

Do I need extra medical insurance?

No. You should always have insurance when you travel abroad. You do not need extra insurance for swine flu.

There are lots of cases in America and Mexico - is it safe to travel there?

Yes. Just make sure you know in advance where to get medical advice from. If you are not sure whether you can travel to a certain country, check the latest travel advice from the Foreign Office at: www.fco.gov.uk.

Is it safe to use public transport now we are in a pandemic?

Yes. Public transport has not been closed during previous pandemics, and while there is a small additional risk to the public, this is no greater than using other public places. Anyone who has the flu or feels unwell should stay at home and not travel.

Will the government restrict travel within the UK?

The government is not planning to restrict travel within the UK unless it becomes necessary for public health reasons. Any restrictions that are considered are likely to be on an advisory basis. Scientific modelling shows that internal travel restrictions would have little impact on the total number of people infected by flu. The public would be advised to reduce non-essential travel where possible and anyone who has the flu or feels unwell should stay at home and not travel.

What happens to visitors to the UK if they are confirmed with swine flu during their stay?

Foreign nationals should not be treated any differently from UK nationals with regard to self-isolation or other recommended measures for symptomatic people. People with symptoms of swine flu, including foreign nationals, are advised not to travel. Overseas visitors will not be charged for NHS hospital treatment for swine flu, including antivirals.

What is the definition of WHO Phase 6?

The technical definition of Phase 6 is human-to-human spread of the virus into at least two countries in one World Health Organisation region, with community level outbreaks in at least one other country in a different WHO region. Because the virus has been spreading for some time in North America, the decision that 'community level outbreaks' were occurring in other regions means that the criteria for Phase 6 have been fulfilled.

Is it a mild infection and therefore no cause for concern?

Don't be complacent, as it is too soon to assume it will be a mild infection. We don't know the profile of the virus and are closely monitoring each case that comes up. Everyone who has been infected with the virus in this country has so far been diagnosed early and treated with antivirals, which reduce the severity of symptoms. The flu virus changes character very rapidly. It can pick up and swap genetic material, which can dramatically change its character, increasing the severity of symptoms. The virus could change in the autumn, so we need to plan for this.

Will hospital capacity be adequate?

Most flu sufferers can be cared for appropriately at home. The UK has well developed plans in place for managing extra demand on the healthcare system during the pandemic for more information (links to external site).

What happens if someone doesn't have a 'flu friend'?

The government has been working with organisations such as the [Red Cross](#) to meet the needs of people who may be isolated or otherwise find it difficult to identify a flu friend.

I did not receive a swine flu leaflet from the Department of Health, how can I get one?

A national door drop of information leaflets was undertaken but copies can may be downloaded from www.direct.gov.uk/swineflu - although it is best to look at the latest information on the website as some advice will be updated (for example the use of the new national flu line).

Information for the public can be found on the NHS Choices information and advice service: <http://www.nhs.uk/> as well as the Department of Health website: www.dh.gov.uk and the Health Protection Agency website: <http://www.hpa.org.uk/>

For local information see the council website: <http://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/> and the primary care trust web site: <http://www.herefordshire.nhs.uk/>

What information is there for schools?

Schools and other children's services are expected to be operating as usual and there is guidance published on planning for, and responding to, pandemic flu. This can be found on the Teachernet website: <http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/emergencies/planning/flupandemic/>

What help is there for businesses in coping with swine flu?

Business Link carries information on business continuity and on protecting the workforce on: www.businesslink.gov.uk/swineflu

The Department for Business Enterprise and Regulatory Reform website also has further references:

<http://www.berr.gov.uk/aboutus/pressroom/page51164.html>