# Pandemic Flu

My Support and Care Services Ltd has taken advice from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and the local authorities and NHS Direct.

**What is swine Flu?**

Swine influenza is a disease in pigs. The virus currently transmitting among people is now generally referred to as swine flu, although the origin of the disease is still under investigation. There is no evidence of this strain of the disease circulating in pigs in the UK.

There are regular outbreaks of swine influenza in pigs worldwide. It does not normally infect humans, although this occasionally does occur - usually in people who have had close contact with pigs.

Swine influenza viruses are usually of the H1N1 subtype. The swine flu that has spread to humans is a version of this virus.

#### Why is swine flu affecting humans?

Because the swine flu virus has mutated (changed) and is now able to infect humans and transmit between them.

#### 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,
* people with chronic heart disease,
* people with chronic kidney disease,
* people with chronic liver disease,
* people with chronic neurological disease,
* people with suppressed immune systems (whether caused by disease or treatment),
* people with diabetes,
* people who have had drug treatment for their asthma within the past three years,
* pregnant women,
* people aged 65 years and older, and
* Young children under five years old.

#### 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 meter (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.

#### 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.

#### What are the symptoms of swine flu?

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

#### How long are symptoms expected to last?

As with any sort of influenza, the severity and duration of symptoms will vary depending on treatment and individual circumstances. Most cases reported in the UK to date have been relatively mild, with those affected starting to recover within a week.

#### 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 products.

**My Support and Care Services Ltd**

**Contingency Plan**

* If you have been in close contact with a person who has Swine flu or suspected symptoms you are to report this immediately to your line manager. You will then be advised to wear a face masks when visiting customers for 7 days after the contact with the infected person.
* Facemasks must be changed regularly as they are less effective when dampened by a person’s breath. People may infect themselves if they touch the outer surface of their mask, or may infect others by not disposing of old masks safely. Finally, wearing a facemask may encourage complacency. People need to focus on good hand hygiene, staying at home if they are feeling unwell, and covering their mouth when they cough or sneeze.
* All staff should follow My Support and Care Services Ltd infection control policy at all times.
* If you display any symptoms of flu like illness or suspected of having Swine Flu you should report this to your line manager and should go home and not return to work until all of your symptoms have gone. (See guidelines NHS Direct as what to if you have Swine Flu).
* In the event of My Support and Care services becoming short staffed due illness. The company will employ Agency staff to cover any outstanding hours. See My Support and Care Services Ltd policy – Employing agency staff.