



Questions & Answers: Novel Influenza A Virus

About the Flu Virus/Current Vaccination

- **What is this novel influenza A virus?**

Influenza A viruses occur in many animals, including humans, swine (pigs) and wild birds. This particular virus is unique from other previous H3N2 human infections in that it also contains a genetic piece of the 2009 H1N1 virus.

- **Is it possible for humans to transmit it to other humans?**

Currently, it does not appear the virus is spreading from person-to-person. However, we will continue to learn more as our investigation into this new virus continues.

- **How serious is this virus?**

We currently know of three cases of this novel influenza virus. One patient has recovered and the other two are recovering. Our investigation will continue to focus on the seriousness of the virus. Based on what we know about other types of flu, illness can range from very mild symptoms to death in particularly susceptible populations (like older people, young children and those with certain medical conditions).

- **What does this mean for this year's flu vaccines? Will the current vaccine cover both seasonal flu and this new strain of flu?**

The 2011-2012 vaccine is the same as last year, covering two strains of influenza A (pandemic H1N1 and a H3N2 strain that has been circulating for a few years now) as well as a strain of influenza B. It is too early to tell whether or not this new strain will even need vaccination.

About the Cases in Pennsylvania and Indiana

- **When were the original cases in Indiana and Pennsylvania first identified? What about the latest cases?**

- On July 23, 2011, the Indiana patient experienced a fever, cough, shortness of breath, diarrhea and sore throat. Testing determined that the individual had a case of influenza. On Aug. 17, it was suspected that the individual had a unique strain of influenza.
- On Aug. 20, 2011, the Pennsylvania patient experienced a sudden fever, non-productive (dry) cough and lethargy (extreme tiredness). Upon examination, the individual tested positive for influenza. Further testing on Aug. 23 suspected that the individual also had a unique form of influenza.
- Two additional cases of the same virus were identified in Pennsylvania the weekend of Sept. 2-5.

- **Can you tell me more about the individuals' ages, residence or gender, specifically for the cases in Pennsylvania?**

We can tell you that all of the cases in Pennsylvania are children. Pennsylvania law protects the privacy of individuals, and due to the rarity of this disease, we are only able to disclose the above information.

- **What's the status of the case/cases we currently are aware of? Are these individuals recovering?**

Both the Indiana and original Pennsylvania case patients have recovered from their illnesses. The additional Pennsylvania children are recovering as well.

- **Are these cases of novel influenza A the same as we've seen in previous years? How not? How so?**

These cases are similar in that the flu virus is of swine-origin and is similar to viruses detected sporadically in previous years. However, they are unique in that they also contain a gene segment from the 2009 influenza A H1N1 virus. As we continue to investigate, we hope to learn more about this new virus.

- **Should we be concerned that a flu pandemic is pending?**

A pandemic is a global outbreak of disease. A flu pandemic happens when a new strain of the flu virus appears for which people have little or no immunity. As a result, it spreads easily from person to person around the world, causing widespread illness and death.

Currently, we don't have any evidence to support that this novel influenza A virus will lead to a pandemic, as we haven't yet been able to prove that it is being transmitted from human to human. As with any new influenza A virus, public health officials are working to learn more about the source of this particular strain and to determine how/if it can be spread from person to person.

- **How were all of these cases in Indiana and Pennsylvania discovered?**

All cases sought care from their health care providers, who in turn shared the results with their respective state health departments. The most recent cases in Pennsylvania were reported as a result of the CDC's report and the information released from the Department of Health, which was why getting the information out to the public quickly was so critical.

- **Is there a link between the case in Indiana and the cases in Pennsylvania?**

We have not found any epidemiological connection between the cases in Indiana and Pennsylvania. However, the three cases in Pennsylvania all reported attending the Washington County Fair, Aug. 13-20.

About the Investigation in Pennsylvania

We're working with the CDC on this investigation, with assistance from the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture. Their international influenza experts are working closely with state and local investigators, and the CDC's laboratory is providing very specialized analysis of the virus. The investigation is focused on determining patterns of influenza-like illness, doing laboratory testing, increasing surveillance and alerting health care providers to this case to assist with reporting efforts. Together, we are continuing to investigate the origin of this influenza strain and whether or not human-to-human transmission is occurring.

About the Pennsylvania Cases

- **Do we know how many other individuals were exposed to the Pennsylvania individuals who tested positive for this new flu virus?**

This is part of our ongoing investigation, to trace all locations and contacts that the patients had while contagious.

- **Is the Department of Health concerned that others may have been exposed?**

The possibility of exposure is there, but we only have three laboratory-confirmed cases identified to date, and do not yet expect that this is being transmitted human to human. However, we strongly encourage anyone who may have flu-like symptoms to call their local health care provider.

- **How does this case affect me?**

At this point, there's no indication that it does affect you. We need our health care providers to be aware so that they are vigilant in evaluating symptoms, reporting cases and following the proper flu prevention guidelines.

- **What are health officials doing to educate the public about this new virus?**

Thanks to our partnerships locally and nationally, we have been able to get the word out early to Pennsylvanians about the importance of following proper flu prevention techniques and getting their seasonal flu vaccine.

Residents should practice flu prevention such as coughing into a tissue or sleeve; washing hands often and disinfecting (cleaning) frequently used surfaces like doorknobs, light switches, etc. These simple steps will help to prevent any human-to-human, animal-to-human or human-to-animal transmission of disease and illness.

About Symptoms, Prevention and Awareness

- **Should I be watching for any specific symptoms?**

Symptoms experienced in the Pennsylvania patients were similar to that of seasonal flu and included fever, lethargy (extreme tiredness), lack of appetite and coughing. Other influenza

symptoms may also include a runny nose, sore throat, eye irritation, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea.

- **What can the public do to reduce their risk of getting the flu?**

One of the most proven ways to fight seasonal influenza is to get an injection or nasal spray of the seasonal flu vaccine. For this new type of influenza, the Department of Health recommends following these simple prevention tips:

- Sneeze or cough into a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands);
- Wash your hands with soap often or use an alcohol-based sanitizer;
- Keep your hands away from your face – don't touch your mouth, nose or eyes;
- Keep frequently used surfaces clean (like knobs, countertops and desks);
- Stay healthy – eat nutritious foods, don't smoke, exercise regularly and get enough sleep; and
- Stay home from work, school, and social gatherings (like concerts, parties, etc.) if you have flu-like and feverish symptoms to help prevent others from catching your illness.

- **I heard all three cases in Pennsylvania had attended an agricultural fair. Should I stay away from fairs and pigs?**

It's important to note that we don't yet know how this virus was transmitted to the three individuals in Pennsylvania. We are not recommending anyone stay away from agricultural fairs or public venues, but rather recommend the public wash their hands after coming into contact with animals at a fair and continue to practice typical flu prevention guidelines.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): Tom Skinner, 404-639-3286
- Pennsylvania Department of Health: Christine Cronkright or Brandi Hunter-Davenport, 717-787-1783
- Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture: Samantha Krepps, 717-787-5085