

Influenza in pigs

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This Primefact provides information for people such as pig owners, piggery workers and veterinarians on the recognition, prevention and implications of influenza in pigs, with particular reference to Pandemic H1N1 2009.

Q: What is Pandemic H1N1 2009?

A: A new strain of influenza has been identified in humans in Australia, apparently originating from North America. This new strain has been named Pandemic H1N1 2009, and includes at least some 'pig-type' genetic material.

Most affected people show mild signs of influenza (fever, coughing, sneezing, tiredness). However, as with all influenza viruses the infection can occasionally be associated with fatalities, especially in people with underlying illnesses.

Q: Can influenza spread from people to pigs?

A: Yes. Pigs have receptors for both avian and human influenza strains, so pigs can be infected by influenza viruses that also affect people.

In July 2009, a pig herd in Australia was infected with Pandemic H1N1 2009 influenza. The infection was most likely transmitted from infected workers who were in contact with the pigs. Cases of human-to-pig transfer have also been recorded overseas. Pigs experimentally infected with Pandemic H1N1 2009 have developed mild disease. There is no evidence of spread from pigs to humans in the current epidemic.

Q: How is influenza spread?

A: Any influenza virus is spread via contact between a susceptible human/animal and an infected human/animal – usually via droplets and aerosols from sneezing and coughing. Results of a recent laboratory experiment suggested that pigs with Pandemic H1N1 2009 shed the virus for up to 10 days after becoming infected.

Q: How worried should I be about my pigs getting sick with Pandemic H1N1 2009?

A: As mentioned above, the source of the infection in July 2009 was most likely infected piggery workers. It is important that humans showing flu-like symptoms and/or those who have been in contact with affected people do not have contact with pigs.

Most commercial farms have strict biosecurity guidelines so that visitors cannot contact the pigs without gaining approval from the owner/manager.

High risk locations for uncontrolled contact between pigs and people include:

- live auctions and markets
- pigs exhibited at agricultural shows
- pet pigs
- petting zoos.

Q: What can I do to prevent my pigs becoming infected with any strain of influenza?

A: It is good practice to prevent people who have the flu from contacting pigs. Given that most infected animals and people shed influenza virus for 7–10 days, people who have had any type of influenza should wait at least 14 days after the onset of symptoms before contacting pigs again.

It is good biosecurity to always prevent contact between non-essential people and your pigs. Washing your hands with soap and water before and after handling pigs is recommended to prevent the transmission of any disease.

Q: What about saleyards, agricultural shows, pet pigs and petting zoos?

A: The same principles for preventing infection of pigs should be adopted at any location where there is potential for contact between infected people and pigs.

Transmission of any influenza strain from people to pigs can be minimised by placing barriers to prevent close contact between pigs and the public, erecting



signs requesting people not to handle the pigs and washing hands before and after handling pigs. People showing signs of any type of influenza should be discouraged from attending these locations for at least 14 days from the onset of symptoms.

Swine influenza is a notifiable disease in Australia, so infected herds are quarantined and strict movement protocols on and off farm apply. There is no risk of people contracting influenza from pigs at saleyards, agricultural shows and petting zoos.

Q: How will I know if my pigs have influenza?

A: If influenza virus was introduced into a pig herd, it would result in many pigs becoming sick in a short space of time. The key clinical signs to look for include:

- new or unusual disease signs, previously not seen in your pigs;
- rapid spread of the disease, with many animals becoming infected;
- fever (>39°C), off-feed, huddling, depression;
- a range of respiratory signs, including coughing and sneezing, with discharge from the nose and eyes
- affected pigs will recover quickly – within 1–2 weeks.

Q: What should I do if I suspect my pigs have any strain of influenza?

A: Phone your local veterinary practitioner or your veterinary consultant and notify your District Veterinarian or the Emergency Animal Disease Watch Hotline on **1800 675 888**.

Q: What will happen if my pigs catch any strain of influenza?

A: If influenza is diagnosed in your pigs, Industry & Investment NSW will take measures to prevent the disease from spreading to other pigs. These measures will be determined by the Department in consultation with other state and federal agencies, and with the relevant human health department(s).

Further information

For further information about influenza in pigs, please contact:

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