

Swine flu advice for patients

Patients should follow general government advice regarding swine flu, either online from the NHS website on www.nhs.uk, or by telephone by calling the Swine Flu Information Line free on **0800 1 513 513**.


What are the symptoms of swine flu?

Typical symptoms of swine flu are a sudden fever (38°C / 100.4°F) and a sudden cough. Other symptoms include headache, chills, aching muscles and joints, diarrhoea or stomach upset, sore throat, runny nose and loss of appetite.

Can I avoid catching swine flu?

In general you should not change your daily activities to avoid exposure to swine flu. If you know that someone has symptoms of swine flu then it would be sensible to avoid this person, if possible, for the duration they have symptoms.

What should I do if I am exposed to someone who has symptoms of swine flu?

If you have caught swine flu you can expect symptoms to develop within 2-7 days of exposure. If you develop symptoms of swine flu you should follow national swine flu guidance and contact your GP or the National Pandemic Flu Service on **0800 1 513 100** or online via www.pandemicflu.direct.gov.uk 

If you are taking steroids

Symptoms of swine flu may be less obvious if you are taking steroids (such as prednisolone). If you feel unwell and think you may have swine flu, please contact your GP even if your symptoms are not as severe as other peoples'. You should not stop taking your steroids.

If you are taking biologic therapies (such as adalimumab, etanercept, infliximab, rituximab, tocilizumab, anakinra) or cyclophosphamide

Symptoms of swine flu may be less obvious if you are taking these treatments. If you feel unwell and think you may have swine flu, please contact your GP even if your symptoms are not as severe as other peoples'. If you have been in direct contact with someone who has definite swine flu (at a time when they had symptoms) you should stop your treatment for seven days. If you have not developed symptoms of swine flu after seven days you can restart treatment.

If you are taking azathioprine, ciclosporin, gold, hydroxychloroquine, leflunomide, methotrexate, mycophenolate, penicillamine or sulphasalazine

If you have been in direct contact with someone who has definite swine flu (at a time when they had symptoms) you should stop your treatment for seven days. If you have not developed symptoms of swine flu after seven days you can restart treatment.

The exception to this information is if your consultant rheumatologist has recommended that you do not stop treatment.

What should I do if I develop symptoms of swine 'flu?

If you develop symptoms of swine flu you should contact your GP or the National Pandemic Flu Service on 0800 1 513 100 or online via www.pandemicflu.direct.gov.uk and consider treatment with Tamiflu in the usual way.

If you are taking biologic therapies (such as adalimumab, etanercept, infliximab, rituximab, tocilizumab, anakinra) or cyclophosphamide or you are taking methotrexate, azathioprine, ciclosporin, hydroxychloroquine, mycophenolate, gold, leflunomide, sulphasalazine

Stop your treatment until the symptoms of swine flu have gone away completely. You can then restart your treatment. Steroids (such as prednisolone) must not be stopped. If you are unwell the dose may need to be increased. Please discuss this with your GP. If your swine flu symptoms are very severe or your condition is deteriorating and you feel very unwell it is important to seek advice from your GP. This is because you may be at higher risk than most people of developing a secondary bacterial infection that may require antibiotics.

Should I have a flu jab?

Yes. When the swine flu vaccination is available (later in the summer or autumn) it is likely that your GP surgery will run a programme of vaccinations in the same way as the usual annual flu jab. You should also have the usual annual flu jab in the normal way.