

Swine Flu

Swine flu is caused by **H1N1** virus. It has got high infectivity to the humans along with high mortality & morbidity rates. Like bird flu virus, it is a RNA virus and belongs to Orthomyxoviridae family.

Persons exposed to the virus may be able to infect others during incubation period which is 24-48 hrs and also during the period of illness which may approximately last upto 1 week. The spread usually occurs through respiratory route however people may get infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose. The disease presents in form of wide range of features like fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills, fatigue, diarrhea, vomiting, pneumonia, respiratory failure and may even prove fatal.

Prophylactic Measures

1. With current transport systems and movement of the populations, our country may not remain free of this threat. Therefore the medical teams capable of clinically diagnosing the flu should be posted at the point of entry for screening all the immigrants who are coming via air, sea, or land routes from various affected countries. These teams should have the capability of taking nasopharyngeal swab samples and transport them to BSL laboratories. For personal protection, these teams should use face masks and adopt adequate universal safety measures to prevent them getting infected while screening.
2. Suspected cases found by medical teams should be quarantined and observed for a period of 3 days. If found infected they should be treated. Children, especially younger children, might potentially be contagious for longer periods.
3. Use of mask for all first responders and medical teams is strongly recommended.
4. Activate BSL type III and IV laboratories
5. Adequate amount of Oseltamivir (TamiFlu) or Zanamivir (Relenza) to be kept ready, hopefully should be effective in swine flu - being RNA virus
6. Citizens of our country should be advised to avoid traveling abroad specially to the affected countries
7. Health ministry and ICMR may look into possibility of acquiring a vaccine (long term measure) through consultation with WHO

8. CDC, Atlanta and WHO should be utilized as referral bodies. India is a signatory to IHR 2006 and may obtain necessary expertise or help if necessary.
9. The health authorities at various levels should keep themselves updated with latest developments about the impending pandemic.