

# Swine Flu

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## An Update from Dr. Allan Handysides, Director, GC Department of Health Ministries

No doubt many will be anxious about the outbreak that is receiving wide coverage in the press. The new strain of flu virus is one that has mutated into a human strain, probably by a cross-reaction between a swine flu and a human flu virus. The new resulting strain is rather virulent, with some 80 deaths having been reported in Mexico and a few cases in the US and Australia – though, to date, there have not been deaths (to my knowledge) in these countries.

I am in the Philippines, and Dr. Landless is in Geneva, but I would like to advise the in-house team of some familiar but important steps. The new virus is a N1H1 strains, and an urgent vaccine production process has already commenced. The previous flu injections you have received *will not be effective* against this strain, so preventive precautions become even more important.

Authorities feel that the infection is spread by aerosol transmission, though this is a new strain and it is not really known whether it will spread, human-to-human, with efficiency. Time will tell. Coughing and sneezing are major ways of polluting the air with tiny droplets that others can inhale; additionally, one's hands become easily contaminated from touching the nose, sneezing into them, or coughing onto them.

I would recommend the following:

1. *If you have respiratory symptoms, even minor ones, stay home!* The illness has a short incubation of a couple of days, and it will soon become apparent whether or not you have the “flu”. If at home for symptoms, wear a mask and follow the suggestions below.
2. *Be extremely vigilant and wash your hands frequently.* It's not a bad idea to have hand sanitizer on hand and to use it frequently. Should you need to use a tissue to blow your nose, I would suggest disposal of the tissue down the toilet, as leaving tissues in waste bins for the cleaning staff to empty only exposes them to potential hazard. It might protect you to wear a mask, but I have no evidence to support such a recommendation. Obviously, when numbers of people wear masks,

others become reminded of the problem. A mask becomes contaminated and needs careful disposal – and must NOT be flushed!

3. *Greet each other with a smile*, but do not be shaking hands with others at this time.
4. *If eating in the GC Cafeteria, ensure that not only you but ALL others use the alcohol sterilizer at the cafeteria entrance*, as ladle handles could be a point of contact that could result in transmission of the virus. Perhaps a friendly monitor could remind folk of this need and ensure a steady supply of the alcohol.
5. *Congregating in large gatherings is a definite danger, should there be a person infected in the group*. I suggest keeping one's distance at this time, and forgoing the usual hugging and ceremonial kissing that is a part of our culture.
6. *For those who travel, these precautions are extremely urgent*. Travel to Mexico would seem to be unwise at this time while the extent and severity of the outbreak is being defined.
7. *I've asked Verna Karst to keep abreast of the Center for Disease Control recommendations*, and for her to have Elizabeth Pettit post a frequent update on the Health Ministries Department website, [www.health20-20.org](http://www.health20-20.org).

Should the outbreak prove more serious, we would have to consider more serious recommendations about church services, and work-at-home programs. Though, at the moment, the outbreak is difficult to forecast, we will try to advise you effectively. Whether the infection will prove susceptible to Tamiflu or other antiviral preparations has not yet been determined, but we will keep you posted.

With sincere hopes that this outbreak will be contained.

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