

Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Swine Flu Detected in Humans who had Direct Contact with Pigs

BALTIMORE (August 17, 2012) – The Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene has identified the influenza virus strain influenza A (H3N2v), in six Queen Anne's County residents (five children and one adult) who had direct contact with pigs. In addition, the Maryland Department of Agriculture identified influenza A with a similar testing pattern in pigs from four Queen Anne's County farms with which the sick people had contact. The pig testing is preliminary and will be confirmed by additional testing. H3N2v is the same virus strain that has been found recently in a number of other states.

None of the infected individuals has developed serious illness or been hospitalized. Symptoms are the same as seasonal flu and include fever and respiratory symptoms, such as sore throat and cough.

Human cases of this influenza strain have been identified in eight other states, including West Virginia and Pennsylvania. The virus was first detected in humans in 2011. Since July 2012, CDC has reported 224 cases of H3N2v. Nationally, there have been eight hospitalizations and no deaths. Most cases have occurred in children, and almost all cases have had contact with swine. In some rare cases, the virus seems to have spread from person-to-person. So far, spread has not continued beyond one or two people.

As a result of the positive tests, the Maryland Department of Agriculture's Animal Health inspectors are on heightened surveillance, monitoring pigs at agricultural fairs around the state more closely for flu-like symptoms. Pigs with any suspicious symptoms or characteristics will be tested on site, with samples sent to the MDA Animal Health Diagnostic Laboratory in Salisbury, which was recently approved by the USDA National Veterinary Services Laboratory for the testing of swine flu. Fairs are currently underway in Montgomery and Worcester Counties. MDA has also sent outreach and education materials, as well as made personal contact, with fair sponsors, extension agents, veterinarians and fair liaisons, to educate them about swine flu and precautions that should be taken. Private veterinarians who encounter swine with suspected influenza like illness should contact the State Veterinarian at [410-841-5810](tel:410-841-5810) or (after hours at: [410-841-5971](tel:410-841-5971).)

Influenza is an infection caused by the influenza virus. It can affect people and other animals, including pigs and birds. There are vaccines against some strains. There is also medication that can be used to treat an influenza infection. Most people recover from illness without receiving medication; however certain people are at higher risk for complications of influenza. Those at higher risk are children under five, the elderly, pregnant women, and those with chronic heart, lung, liver, kidney and neurologic conditions or immunosuppression.

The spread of influenza, including the possible spread of H3N2v, between humans can be prevented by:

- Covering your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
- Washing your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. If soap and water are not available, an alcohol-based hand rub may be used.
- Avoiding touching your eyes, nose or mouth.
- Trying to avoid close contact with sick people.
- If you are sick, staying home from work or school.
- Getting the seasonal influenza vaccine when it becomes available. Although it is not effective against H3N2v, it is protective against other common strains of influenza.

The spread of influenza between pigs and humans can be prevented by:

- Washing your hands frequently with soap and running water before and after exposure to animals.
- Never eating, drinking or putting things in your mouth in animal areas.
- Considering avoiding exposure to pigs and swine barns this summer, especially if sick pigs have been identified and if you are high risk of complications from influenza.
- Watching your farm animals, including pigs, for signs of illness and calling a veterinarian if you suspect they might be sick.
- Avoiding close contact with animals that look or act ill, and
- Avoiding contact with pigs if you are experiencing flu-like symptoms.

DHMH recommends that people with influenza-like illness who have risk factors for complications or with serious illness contact their healthcare provider and inform them if they have had pig contact within the past seven days.

“Information on Swine Influenza/Variant Influenza Viruses” is available at <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/swineflu/>

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