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INFLUENZA A(H1N1) (ALSO KNOWN AS SWINE FLU OR MEXICAN FLU)

The following information about swine flu is made available to you to enable you to take the necessary precautions to safeguard yourself, your family and friends.

Swine influenza is spreading around the world fairly quickly, with the majority of cases being reported in Mexico and the United States. The first case of swine flu was positively identified in South Africa in June 2009. Since then, the number of reported cases of swine flu in South Africa has increased slowly, but no related deaths have been recorded.

The National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) is confident that South Africa has adequate monitoring infrastructure in place to manage this situation.

1. What can I do to protect myself from swine flu?

The main route of transmission of the swine flu virus seems to be similar to seasonal influenza i.e. the common 'flu', via droplets that are expelled by speaking, sneezing or coughing. You may prevent getting infected by avoiding close contact with people who have flu-like symptoms (try to maintain a distance of about one metre if possible) and take the following measures:

- Avoid touching your mouth and nose.
- Clean hands thoroughly with soap and water, or cleanse them with an alcohol-based hand wash on a regular basis (especially if touching the mouth and nose, or surfaces that are potentially contaminated).
- Avoid close contact with people who might be ill.
- Reduce the time spent in crowded settings if possible.
- Improve airflow in your living space by opening windows.
- Practice good health habits including adequate sleep, eating nutritious food and keeping physically active.

2. Is it necessary that I wear a mask?

- If you are not ill, you do not have to wear a mask.
- If you are caring for an ill person, you may wear a mask when you are in close contact with him/her and dispose of it immediately after contact, and cleanse your hands thoroughly afterwards.
- If you are ill and must travel or be around others, cover your mouth and nose.
- Using a mask correctly in all situations is essential. Incorrect use actually increases the chance of spreading infection.

3. How do I know if I have swine flu?

You will not be able to tell the difference between seasonal flu and swine flu without medical help. Typical symptoms to look out for are similar to seasonal viruses and include fever, cough, headache, body aches, sore throat and runny nose. Only a healthcare professional and the local health authority may confirm a case of swine flu.

4. What should I do if I think I have swine flu?

If you are feeling ill, have high fever, cough or sore throat:

- stay at home and keep away from work, school or crowds
- rest and take plenty of fluids
- cover your nose and mouth when coughing and sneezing and, if using tissues, make sure you dispose of them carefully. Clean your hands immediately afterwards with soap and water or cleanse them with an alcohol-based hand wash
- when you cough or sneeze, cover your mouth as much as possible with the crook of your elbow if you do not have a tissue handy
- use a mask to help contain the spread of droplets when you are around others, but be sure to do so correctly
- inform family and friends about your condition and try to avoid contact with other people
- if possible, contact a healthcare professional before travelling to a health facility to discuss whether a medical examination is necessary.

5. Should I take an antiviral medication now just in case I contract swine flu?

No. You should only take an antiviral, such as oseltamivir or zanamivir, if your healthcare provider advises you to do so. Individuals should not buy medication to prevent or fight this swine flu without a prescription, and they should exercise caution in buying antiviral medication online.

6. Should I stop breastfeeding if I am ill?

No; unless a healthcare professional advises it. Studies on other types of flu infections show that breastfeeding is most likely protective for babies; as it passes on helpful maternal antibodies and lowers the risk of respiratory disease. Breastfeeding provides the best overall nutrition for babies and increases their defence factors to fight disease.

7. At what point should I seek medical care?

You should seek medical care if you experience shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, or if a fever continues for more than three days. For parents with a young child who is ill, seek medical care if a child has fast or laboured breathing, continuing fever or convulsions (seizures). Supportive home care is adequate for recovery in most cases such as resting, drinking plenty of fluids and using a pain reliever for aches. A non-aspirin pain reliever should be used by children and young adults to prevent the risk of developing Reye's syndrome. (*Reye's syndrome is a potentially fatal condition that causes numerous detrimental effects to many organs, especially the brain and liver. It is associated with aspirin consumption by children with viral conditions.*)

8. Should I go to work if I have the flu but am feeling OK?

No. Whether you have swine flu or seasonal flu, you should stay home and away from work for the duration of your symptoms. This is a precaution to protect your work colleagues and others.

9. May I travel if I'm ill?

If you are feeling ill or have symptoms of flu, you should not travel. If you have any doubts about your health, you should consult with a healthcare professional.

10. Who may I contact for further information?

- Doctors may contact the **National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD)** hotline on 082 477 8026 between 08.00 am and 05.00 pm, Mondays to Fridays. The public may contact the swine flu hotline on 0861 DOH CDC (0861 364 232).
- Visit the World Health Organisation (WHO) website:
http://www.who.int/csr/disease/swineflu/frequently_asked_questions/what/en/index.html