
Public Health Notice: Flu related to agricultural fairs and petting zoos

August 20, 2012

Why you should take note

A recent outbreak of influenza in the United States is linked to people, mostly children, handling and petting pigs at agricultural fairs and petting zoos.

Although this strain of influenza, known as H3N2v (the “v” stands for variant), has not been detected in Canada, families should be aware that it could eventually be circulating in swine in this country. Many Canadian families visit agricultural fairs taking place at this time of year and may be exposed to this flu virus.

The H3N2v virus doesn't spread easily from swine to people—and even less easily from person to person. In most cases, the virus causes only mild illness in people. Still, even with the low risk, there are steps you can take to protect yourself and your loved ones.

What you should do

People of certain groups, including children younger than five, appear to be at higher risk of complications from the flu. Such individuals should consider avoiding pig barns or pens, especially if sick pigs have been identified.

If you do plan a trip to a petting zoo or fall fair, have fun and stay safe by following good precautionary measures.

General tips

Parents and caregivers

Young children and infants are more susceptible to becoming sick from animal exposure compared to adults.

Supervise children carefully around animals and make sure that they do not put their hands, or anything they find in the animal's area, in their mouths. Animal feed/treats and hay, for example, could spread disease.

Be sure that children wash their hands thoroughly after visiting with animals.

Don't allow toys or child equipment (strollers, etc.) into animal pens.

If you get sick

You may wish to check with your healthcare professional if you believe you have the flu and you:
are 65 years or older

have a weakened immune system
experience severe symptoms
experience symptoms lasting longer than seven days.

Make sure you tell your healthcare professional if you've been in contact with pigs before becoming ill.

Symptoms of an H3N2v flu infection

The symptoms are similar to other types of flu. They include:

Fever (may not be present in the very young and old)
Cough
Runny nose or congestion
Sore throat
Body aches
Nausea
Vomiting
Diarrhea (in children 5 years or younger)

Who is most at risk?

Children younger than 14 years are at higher risk for getting sick with this flu.

As with any flu virus, young children, seniors, Aboriginal peoples, pregnant women and those with weakened immune systems because of other medical conditions are at greater risk for serious complications related to the flu.

Most of the cases of illness are associated with contact with swine. There is a low risk of person-to-person transmission.

Media Contact

Public Health Agency of Canada
Media Relations
(613) 941-8189