

Swine Flu

Information for asylum seekers, refugees and other foreign nationals in the UK

This page gives you basic information about the swine flu illness. Treatment for swine flu is free. It is important that you understand what you can do to protect yourself and your family.

What is swine flu?

- A form of flu caused by a virus which is easy to catch and to pass on to others.
- The first cases were reported in April 2009 and it has spread quickly around the world.

What are the symptoms of swine flu?

If you or a member of your family has a fever or high temperature (over 38°C / 100.4°F) and two or more of the following symptoms, you may have swine flu:

- unusual tiredness
- headache
- runny nose
- sore throat
- shortness of breath or a cough
- loss of appetite
- aching muscles
- diarrhoea or vomiting

How is it transmitted?

- When people have swine flu, they spread the virus by coughing or sneezing, other people then breathe in the virus.
- The flu virus can live on hands and other surfaces for up to 24 hours.

How can I protect myself and my family?

- Use a clean tissue to cover your mouth and nose when you cough and sneeze.

- Throw away the tissue into a bin after one use.
- Wash your hands with soap and water or an antibacterial hand gel often and clean down surfaces regularly to kill the virus.
- Identify possible flu friends. These could be neighbours, friends and relatives who can help you if you get ill. For example, they could collect medicines and food for you.
- If you are an asylum seeker and have swine flu, you or your flu friend should contact your United Kingdom Border Agency case owner to make alternative arrangements for the collection of support payments, so that you don't have to leave your accommodation. You should also contact your case owner or the reporting centre to make alternative reporting arrangements.
- If you are pregnant, carry on doing the things that you normally do, such as going shopping, travelling on public transport and attending family gatherings. However, try and avoid visiting family or friends who are suffering flu-like symptoms. If you know of a large number of people falling ill in your neighbourhood, you may prefer to avoid crowded places where possible.

What is the swine flu vaccination?

Vaccinations (an injection to protect people from catching the virus) against swine flu have been approved for use and are being given by local doctors to people who are in the following priority groups:

- Adults and children over six months of age who have a long-term health condition including :
 - chronic lung disease
 - chronic heart disease
 - chronic kidney disease
 - chronic liver disease
 - chronic neurological disease
 - diabetes
- Pregnant women
- People who live with someone who has an impaired immune system caused by an illness, for example someone who is HIV positive or is having chemotherapy for cancer.

If you believe you are in one of these groups of people, contact your local doctor and register with them to receive the vaccine. The vaccination programme is being extended to include children from six months and over and under five years. This will start once all the initial priority groups have been targeted. Other people may be vaccinated as more is learned about the virus and the vaccine.

How to find a doctor

Your local doctor is called a General Practitioner or GP. The GP's clinic is called a surgery or a health centre. You should register with a GP in your area if you have not already done this, so that you can get medical care if you need it.

If you are an asylum seeker, and are not registered with a GP, your accommodation provider support worker who helped you to move into your accommodation can give you information about your local GPs.

Contact details for GPs are available in telephone directories and from public libraries. You can also find details of GPs in England on the NHS Choices website at www.nhs.uk and of GPs in Scotland on www.show.scot.nhs.uk/organisations. Details of local GPs in Wales can be found through www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk and at www.nidirect.gov.uk for GPs in Northern Ireland.

What to do if you think you have swine flu

- Stay in your accommodation and rest.
- Make sure you drink lots of water.
- If you have a fever, don't wear too many clothes or blankets. You can take paracetamol or ibuprofen (follow the instructions on the pack). If you are pregnant, paracetamol is recommended.

Telephone your local doctor if you answer 'yes' to one or more of the following:

- Do you have a serious underlying illness or take medication for another serious illness?
- Are you pregnant?
- Is the person who is sick a child under one year old?
- Has your condition suddenly got much worse?
- Is your condition still getting worse after seven days (or five days for a child)?

If you are living in England and you have answered 'no' to all the questions above :

- If you have recently claimed asylum and are living in United Kingdom Border Agency initial accommodation, tell the health team or support team if you are unwell, so they can help you.
- Contact the National Pandemic Flu Service. This is an internet and telephone service currently operating in England which allows you to check your symptoms for swine flu and get treatment if necessary. If you do not speak English, you can ask an English-speaking friend to contact the Flu Service for you.

To use the National Pandemic Flu Service:

- Telephone **0800 1 513 100** (this is free if you use a landline telephone but you will be charged if you use a mobile telephone)
- Use the internet at www.direct.gov.uk/pandemicflu
- If you have problems hearing, you can use a textphone service on **0800 1 513 200**

When you ring **0800 1 513 100** or visit the website, the National Pandemic Flu Service will ask for :

- Your date of birth

- Your current symptoms
- If you have any serious medical conditions
- Your postcode
- You or your English-speaking friend will need a pen and paper to write down any information.

If you are diagnosed with swine flu through the National Pandemic Flu Service:

- You will be offered free antiviral medication called Tamiflu or Relenza. Antiviral medication will not cure you but should help you get better sooner. Most people recover fully within 7 to 10 days. It is important that you complete the course of treatment.
- You will be given an 'authorisation number' and your flu friend will have to collect the medicine from a specific Antiviral Collection Point. You will be told the nearest collection point. Anyone with swine flu must not collect the medicine.
- As well as the authorisation number, your flu friend will need to show some proof of identification for themselves and for you (or the person who has swine flu, if this isn't you). If you are an asylum seeker, this could be an ARC card or Standard Acknowledgement Letter (SAL) issued by the United Kingdom Border Agency, or a passport, gas or electricity bill, driving licence or a bank or credit card.
- Your flu friend will be told how you should take the antivirals when they collect your medication.
- Any asylum claim will not be affected if you use this service.
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If you live in Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland

If you live in Wales and have swine flu symptoms, contact your GP.

For general information call NHS Direct Wales on **0845 46 47**. If you live in Scotland and have swine flu symptoms, contact your GP or NHS 24 on **08454 242424**.

If you live in Northern Ireland and have swine flu symptoms, contact your GP or the Northern Ireland swine flu helpline on **0800 0514142**.