

Mexican influenza outbreak – what you need to know.

Health authorities are scrambling to contain an outbreak of a severe 'flu-like illness in Mexico which has an unusually high fatality rate. By yesterday (April 23, 2009), at least 134 people – mostly young adults – were known to have been infected. Twenty of these patients have died.

Symptoms

Symptoms include:

- High fever
- Headache
- Eye pain
- Shortness of breath
- Extreme fatigue (weakness)

The symptoms are described as progressing rapidly, with patients experiencing severe respiratory distress within about five days. A high proportion of patients have required respirators in order to breathe. It is critically important that anyone experiencing 'flu-like symptoms *within 10 days of returning from Mexico* be examined by a doctor. Please let the doctor's office know that you are concerned about Mexican flu when you book the appointment.

Swine 'flu?

Scientists have identified *a number of different viruses* among those infected so far, including viruses linked to "A-strain" and "B-strain" influenza. Further testing is currently underway on samples from the Mexican outbreak and test results are expected soon. The question researchers want answered is whether the Mexican outbreak is linked to a handful of cases of an "A-strain" type of swine 'flu which have been documented in California and Texas in the past month.

Swine 'flu usually infects people who have come into contact with pigs, although human-to-human transmission has also been documented. Infection results in a wide variety of symptoms, often manifesting as an uncomplicated influenza-like illness. The recent cases in the southern United States, in areas close to the Mexican border, have been linked to viruses with a unique genetic combination which had not previously been seen. The concern is that, as this is a new type of "A-strain" influenza, that people have not been exposed to it and as such will have limited resistance.

As this is a rapidly developing situation, additional information will be shared as it becomes available.