

Get Some [Swine Flu] Common Sense

By now everyone knows. It's front page news. There's something out there.

So what can you do now?

DON'T PANIC

It's spring, and seasonal allergy symptoms are upon us. Symptoms that to a large extent, are indistinguishable from the flu. With that in mind, the key to staying safe is a return to common sense in how we handle the smaller moments of our everyday lives.

Stay in your own personal space, and respect the space of others. Cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze. Releasing the virus into the air through these normal happenings are the most common means of passing the virus onto others.

Whether airborne or from touch, it's the invisible virus that may be on the taps, door handles, telephones and other surfaces that thousands of fingers touch. Wash well with soap and water. Carry some alcohol based hand disinfectant, and use it regularly.

Common things being common, if you have recently returned from an area where swine flu has been reported and you develop any of: fever, sore throat, chills, body ache, headache, fatigue, stuffy nose, cough, diarrhea, and vomiting – you've more likely than not got something else - something totally benign.

However, you won't know unless you get cultured. Call a health facility, tell them your story and book an appointment. As improbable as it is that you have swine flu, the facility needs to take preparatory precautions.

If you are sick, and the doctor has suggested the problem is infectious, not allergic, do yourself and everyone else a favour – stay home, stay off the streets, and keep away from public transportation. Do not go to work. Do not let your children go to school. School children are a major source of influenza virus spread.

It should be noted that swine flu viruses are genetically very different to human viruses. Flu shots traditionally given for human seasonal influenza do not provide protection against this strain of swine flu. But there are two drugs that doctors can prescribe, so do not worry that modern science has lagged behind modern disease.

Unlike Mexico, where over 150 people are believed to have died as result of the outbreak, swine flu patients in other parts of the world have not been experiencing the same severity of illness, and no deaths have been reported. While this is no cause for celebration, it is cause to keep from panicking.

The virus is spreading though, and seemingly without pattern, so be alert. Wash your hands thoroughly, stay in your own personal space. Sneeze into your elbow, if you can't reach the tissue box in time.