

What the General Public should know and understand about Respirators and Swine Influenza (A/H1N1)

Currently, we are not aware of any country or government that is recommending the use of respirators by the general public for the virus that causes Swine Influenza ("A/H1N1") or any other influenza. However, the World Health Organization (WHO), US Center for Disease Control (CDC), US Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), and several European and/ or National Health Protection agencies have recommended that health care workers exposed to patients with confirmed or suspected Swine Influenza use respiratory protection. Government approved particulate respirators help reduce exposure to the Swine Influenza virus and recommendations include US NIOSH approved N95, European CE certified EN143P2 / EN149 FFP2, EN149FFP3, or higher-level respiratory protection.

The CDC has determined that the Swine Influenza virus is contagious and is spreading from human to human. However, at this time, it is not known how easily the virus spreads between people. Spread of the Swine Influenza virus is thought to be happening in the same way that seasonal flu spreads. Flu viruses are spread mainly from person to person through coughing or sneezing of people that are infected with influenza. People may also become infected by touching something with the flu virus on it and then touching their mouth or nose.

Currently, there is no vaccine available to protect against the Swine Influenza. There are, however, everyday actions that can help prevent the spread of germs that cause respiratory illnesses like influenza. These include strict hand hygiene, covering your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, not touching your eyes, nose or mouth and avoiding close contact with sick people.

In addition to direct contact with infected pigs, people or contaminated surfaces, it is also possible for a person to contract the illness through contact with airborne particles. When airborne this virus, like other biological agents, can be filtered by respirators that contain particulate filters. However, the government has not established a safe level of exposure to biological agents. This means that any virus particle you breathe may be unsafe. Therefore, while respirators can help reduce exposure to Swine Influenza viruses, there is no guarantee that the user will not contract the Swine flu. Respirators may help reduce exposures to airborne biological contaminants, but they don't eliminate the risk of exposure, infection, illness, or death.

Nevertheless, if people in the general public make a personal decision to use a government approved respirator to help reduce their exposure to airborne influenza virus, they need to understand that:

1. Reducing exposure to the airborne influenza virus particles does not mean that the risk of exposure, infections and illness has been eliminated. Respirators will not prevent you from catching the flu in other ways such as by touching your mouth, nose or eyes with contaminated hands or objects, or eating contaminated food. At this time the CDC recommends the best precaution for the general public is hand washing.

2. In order for a respirator to be most effective you must properly wear the respirator during the entire time you're exposed. Removing the respirator to eat, drink, talk or smoke while you are in a contaminated area will increase the likelihood that you may be exposed to virus particles when breathing. You should also contact the respirator manufacturer to understand how to properly fit the respirator to your face.
3. Fit of the respirator to your face is very important to minimize virus particles from getting inside your respirator. Particles can enter your respirator through any leaks between the respirator and your face. Hair from beards and mustaches or anything that prevents the respirator from directly touching your skin can prevent a proper seal. Following the instructions to assure a proper fit is essential. Achieving a good fit means more of the air you breathe goes through the respirator filter rather than around the mask.
4. Respirators are not intended for use by children or by individuals with a medical condition that might prevent the use of a respirator, such as asthma, emphysema or a history of heart disease. If you have such a condition, consult your health care provider before use.
5. Disposable respirators should be thrown away after they are used and once used should not be shared with others.
6. Be sure to read and follow all instructions on the fit, use and warnings provided by the manufacturer before using any respirator.
7. Please be cautious of claims being made by Websites and other sources regarding the use of respirators for protection against Swine influenza. We recommend that you reference your National Government or National Health Protection Agency for guidance.

For more up-to-date information, please visit one of the following sites:

- U.S. Center for Disease Control (CDC): www.cdc.gov
- World Health Organization (WHO): www.who.int

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