

Swine Flu: Media, Medicine & Natural Health Perspectives

by Edward Bauman, M.Ed., Ph.D.

The Swine Flu outbreak of Spring 2009 created a media circus and nightly news horror movie with all of us as supporting actors (without pay).

THE PLOT: A new molecule of mass destruction is released from our neighbor to the South, comprised of a deadly mix of bird, human, and swine flu, and the phenomenon is described as pandemic. Mass fear is engendered and panic-driven questions are raised. Is this microbial Katrina stoppable? Can we find a vaccination in time? Are there enough respiratory protective masks to go around? Could this be the fulfillment of a biblical prophecy related to eating animals with cloven hooves, a symptom of bad animal husbandry, biological warfare... is it all, some, or none of the above?

Let's step back from the media circus for a moment and explore the origin and epidemiology of this hybrid flu. Maybe we can integrate medical and natural health approaches and minimize our risk of getting this nasty bug. Maybe, as usual, an ounce of prevention will do the trick.

Overview

According to the Harvard Medical School website (www.health.harvard.edu/flu-resource-center/swine-flu-updates.htm reported), there



have been 2,618 confirmed cases of swine flu (H1N1) in the U.S. since **May 11**, three of them fatal. California has had the most cases (191), but 44 states (including D.C.) have been involved. In addition to the 3 deaths in the U.S., there have been 48 deaths in Mexico, 1 in Costa Rica, and 1 in Canada. Turns out this is pretty good news. In a typical year, about 36,000 Americans die from the flu (www.cdc.gov/flu/about/qa/disease.htm). So in the end, despite all the hoopla, the swine flu has been no more virulent than a regular flu.



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H1N1 is a new strain of flu that appears to be easily transmitted between people, so it had the potential to become a pandemic – fortunately, that didn't happen. A pandemic is when a new infectious disease is spreading throughout the world, whether the symptoms be mild or life threatening (www.cdc.gov/flu/about/qa/disease.htm).

The last major swine flu outbreak occurred in 1918, so few people alive today have any resistance. This triggered concern that it could spread rapidly throughout the world and kill large numbers of people. Fortunately, this particular variation contains DNA from several different strains of flu, including human flu that many people have been exposed to, so many people likely had some built-in resistance, which would keep symptoms far milder. Another bit of luck is that the virus hit when the winter flu season was officially over in the northern hemisphere, making it easier for health and medical officials to identify and isolate cases.

Probable Cause

Experts have been warning for years that the rise of large-scale factory farms in North America has created the perfect breeding grounds for the emergence and spread of new, highly-virulent strains of influenza.



"Because concentrated animal feeding operations tend to concentrate large numbers of animals close together, they facilitate rapid transmission and mixing of viruses."

U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH), 2006

Three years earlier, *Science Magazine* had warned that swine flu was on a new evolutionary "fast track" due to the increasing size of factory farms and the widespread use of vaccines in these operations.

It's the same story with bird flu. The crowded and unsanitary conditions of the farms make it possible for a virus to recombine and take on new forms very easily. Once this happens, the centralized nature of the industry ensures that the disease gets carried far and wide via feces, feed, water, and even the boots of workers. Yet, according to the *U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention* (CDC), "no formal national surveillance system exists to determine what viruses are prevalent in the U.S. swine population." The same is true of Mexico (www.organicconsumers.org/articles/article_17763.cfm).

Given that conditions exist that could engender a truly dangerous pandemic flu virus, looks like we got lucky this time. It's important, however, that we take good care of our immune systems so we can rest easy during future flu outbreaks.

Prevention Strategies

Hygiene

Basic hygiene is very important in preventing infection from any type of flu, including swine flu. This strategy is simple but worthwhile, as validated by research. Here are some specific tips from *Scientific American* (www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=how-to-clip-bird-flus-wings):



- ▶ Wash your hands often with soap and hot water, especially after sneezing, coughing, or close contact with an infected person. Alcohol-based hand soaps, like Purell, provide great sanitation.
- ▶ If you feel the need to sneeze or cough, cover your nose and mouth with a tissue and dispose of it afterward.
- ▶ Avoid close contact with sick people.
- ▶ If you become sick, stay home from work or school and limit your contact with others.
- ▶ To prevent the spread of germs, avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.

Face Masks

According to the CDC, there is "extremely limited" data on the effectiveness of face masks and respirators for blocking flu spread in communities. The agency suggests, however, that people consider using them when it's impossible to avoid "crowded settings or close contact with others" in areas where swine flu transmission has been confirmed.

Vaccine

There is no effective vaccine against swine flu at the moment, but the CDC recommends using *Tamiflu* (oseltamivir) or *Relenza* (zanamivir) to treat or prevent it (www.scientificamerican.com/blog/60-second-science/post.cfm?id=what-is-swine-flu-us-declares-publi-2009-04-26). Unfortunately, a whopping 98% of this year's circulating H1N1 flu strains are immune to Tamiflu, compared with only 12% during the 2007-2008 flu season.



Natural Health Recommendations

Flu season is like hurricane or earthquake season, wherein a vulnerable area is hit with a confluence of threats, causing a breach in natural defenses. Louis Pasteur, the father of modern germ theory and antibiotic use, was reported to have reversed his position on his deathbed, saying "it's not the germ, but the terrain" (the body) that becomes frail and leads to disease and death. No doubt he would concur that an active, health-creating lifestyle is our greatest natural defense and flu protection.

Those at the greatest risk for catching a flu and succumbing to it are the frail, elderly, injured, exhausted, malnourished, and immune-compromised. Opportunistic infections prey on weak plant, animal, and human tissue. To keep up your natural vitality and strong immunity, I recommend you provide yourself with the following on a daily basis:

- ▶ Sunlight
- ▶ Fresh filtered water
- ▶ Deep breathing and physical activity
- ▶ Fresh, whole foods
- ▶ Herbs, spices and antioxidant nutrients
- ▶ Rest, relaxation, and creative expression
- ▶ Peace, love, and deep roots in community

Numerous foods, herbs and nutrients provide cellular nutrition for viral defense. To get a detailed *Eating For Health™ Food Plan and Immune Support Protocol*, please visit www.baumancollege.org and search for "Swine Flu Protection."

Stay well and strong!

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