

## Swine Flu podcast

**John:** Welcome to this edition of Patient Listening a Podcast service from Marshfield Clinic where we present health topics to you without all the technical jargon so you can get information that is easy to understand and useful to you in your everyday life. I'm your host John Tracy.

The recent discovery and announcement of the presence of swine flu in the United States has led to a lot of questions about just what it is and how to contain it.

As of the time of this podcast 40 cases of swine flu have been identified in the US and the CDC anticipates that the number will grow, but to what degree they aren't sure.

Marshfield Clinic Epidemiologist Dr. Ed Belongia offered some statements about swine flu. Dr. Belongia, what can you tell us today?

**Dr. Belongia:** Since you first saw the situation was changing rapidly, a lot of unanswered questions; so I expect things to evolve over the next few days so more information can become available. What we know right now is that we have a new type of influenza virus that has not been previously identified in people and has both swine and avian and human components to it. So far in the US, there have been more than twenty cases, as of today anyway, and it's probably the tip of the iceberg. We don't know how many cases there are; the number of cases is rapidly evolving so it is still under investigation. The key thing here is, first of all there is a concern since this virus has not been previously seen in human populations. That it could cause a pandemic because there is little-to-no immunity in people to this virus. That it could spread across the globe and cause severe illness. In fact, that's what appears to be the case in Mexico, but there are a lot of unanswered questions about what's happening in Mexico and how many of the cases were actually confirmed and I know that the CDC is actively working with the Mexican government now to try and resolve and learn more about the situation in Mexico because there appears to be a discrepancy between what's been reported from the Mexico City area and what's known about the cases in the US. And at least as far as the information that I have available from the past 24 hours is that only two of the confirmed cases in the US were hospitalized and there have been no deaths at all in the US due to this virus. And so that is in contrast to what appears to be going on in Mexico. The reasons for that are not well understood.

Another interesting thing that is important to know is that the virus does appear to be susceptible to the most important anti-viral drugs we use for influenza. So that's good and the US has released a portion of the national stockpile to be available in that situation. But then again it's not clear yet what proportion of people are going to develop severe illness or need anti-viral treatment because many of the cases in the US have been fairly unremarkable, kind of typical flu cases.

**John:** Locally from a state level what have you seen and what is the plan for patients that are being seen with flu like symptoms?

**Dr. Belongia:** There have been no cases in Wisconsin, not that I have heard of anyway; no reported cases in the state of Wisconsin. But the state health department is asking physicians to obtain samples and submit them to the state labs for testing for certain individuals who have either recently returned from Mexico or Southern California, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, or if they have been in contact with someone who lives in those areas who have been ill in the past seven days before they had become ill. They should collect samples from those patients and send them to the state lab for further testing to look for the swine flu virus. They will usually complete that testing within twenty-four hours. And the Marshfield Clinic has a team that is meeting on this to insure that an appropriate response is underway here, working with the local and state health authorities.

**John:** What general recommendations do you have for people that are concerned with this bug and what are some of the preventative measures that can be taken?

**Dr. Belongia:** Things people can do to stay healthy, and these are just basics in preventing the transmission of the regular flu as well; cover your nose and mouth when you cough, cough into your sleeve, wash your hands frequently with soap and water especially after coughing or sneezing, if it is not feasible to wash your hands that often use some alcohol based hand sanitizer, avoid touching your eyes or nose or mouth because that's how these viruses are spread.

The flu is spread mainly by person to person contact from sneezing or coughing, spreading droplets from infected people, or from touching objects that have those secretions on them. But again this is in the context of right now there are no confirmed cases in Wisconsin but the state is very actively looking at this and has advised physicians to be on the ware for this.

**John:** There are a number of reliable resources available to help you further understand swine flu. A couple to keep in mind are our web site [Marshfieldclinic.org](http://Marshfieldclinic.org) where we have posted general information about this strain of influenza as well the Center for disease Control's web site [www.cdc.gov/swineflu](http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu) where you can get up to the minute counts of swine flu cases in the United States.

That's all the time we have for this edition of Patient Listening. On behalf of Dr. Ed Belongia, thanks for your time and for listening.

Patient Listening is a podcast service of Marshfield Clinic and is produced by the Corporate Communications department.