

Charleston Gazette Web Chat on May 6, 2009
Kanawha County Health Officer Dr. Rahul Gupta
Answers Questions About the Swine Flu

- 8:45** **Gary Harki:** Welcome to the Gazette's live chat with Kanawha County Health Officer Dr. Rahul Gupta. He will be answering questions on the swine flu starting at 9 a.m.
- 8:45** **Gary Harki:** Feel free to go ahead and submit questions.
- 9:01** **Gary Harki:** Good morning and welcome again to the live chat with Dr. Rahul Gupta.
- 9:01** **Gary Harki:** I'd like to thank Dr. Gupta for taking the time to be with us this morning.
- 9:02** **Dr. Gupta:** Thank you and welcome everyone!
- 9:02** **Gary Harki:** I also want to thank Kanawha County Prosecutor Mark Plants for agreeing to postpone the chat with him until next week.
- 9:02** **Gary Harki:** No we'll begin...
- 9:03** **Gary Harki:** Excuse me, *now* we'll begin...
- 9:03** **[Comment From OWEN SMITH]**
ANY REPORTED CASES IN WEST VIRGINIA
- 9:03** **Dr. Gupta:** No, there are currently no confirmed OR probable cases in WV.
- 9:03** **[Comment From Diane]**
With the death of the schoolteacher in Texas from swine flu, do you think that more schools and businesses, especially in the southern states, should remain closed? At least until the number of cases decline?
- 9:04** **Dr. Gupta:** Well it's a good question. However, we expect deaths to occur with this disease. I don't see any changes to school guidance that was updated from CDC yesterday.
- 9:05** **[Comment From Secret Squirrel]**
Is the swine flu really more deadly than other strains? Can you give us some sort of comparison?
- 9:06** **Dr. Gupta:** In fact, this flu may be quite similar to the seasonal flu. However, we have very few cases so far (fortunately). We must remember that regular flu causes 36,000 deaths and 200,000 hospitalizations in U.S. each year...
- 9:06** **[Comment From Just Wondering]**
Are we any closer to developing a vaccine for this strain?
- 9:07** **Dr. Gupta:** So far, there are about 403 confirmed and 702 suspected cases of H1N1 in U.S. with 2 deaths.
- 9:07** **[Comment From Untitled]**
Is the swine flu certain to reach WV?
- 9:07** **Dr. Gupta:** Scientists at NIH & CDC are working on it.
- 9:07** **Dr. Gupta:** Eventually we do expect to see cases here.
- 9:08** **Dr. Gupta:** We know that about 44 states are involved already.
- 9:08** **[Comment From Not sick]**
What can I do to protect my kids and my grandmother from getting sick with this?
- 9:08** **Dr. Gupta:** Perhaps, our lack of participation is related to population density and travel...
- 9:09** **Dr. Gupta:** Most important: Stay away from folks that may be exhibiting signs of flu like illness, wash

hands/use sanitizers, esp when out of your home and cover your face when coughing/sneezing.

9:10 [Comment From Marc H]

I was in Mexico and specifically in Mexico City a couple of weeks ago. I sat next to a Mexican woman and she was very sick on the trip home. I am a bit concerned about my exposure, but I do not know how long it takes to contract the flu??? Should I be worried?

9:11 Dr. Gupta: At this time you are good if no symptoms. Generally, expect symptoms to develop 5-10 days after being infected. Incubation period is 1-4 days (approx).

9:11 Dr. Gupta: Also, some may have so mild an illness that not notice it.

9:12 Gary Harki: So you could have a mild case of the swine flu?

9:13 Dr. Gupta: Yes, in fact we believe a lot more people may have been infected that being reported because many may have very minor illness which is kind of good.

9:13 [Comment From Traveler?]

I have a trip planned to San Antonio, TX next week, should I go?

9:14 Dr. Gupta: Yes, however take precautions per following link:
<http://wwwn.cdc.gov/travel/contentSwineFluUS.aspx>

9:15 [Comment From missy]

Normally those folks considered "high risk" are the elderly and small children - which doesn't seem to be the case here. How is this flu different?

9:16 Dr. Gupta: The median age for this flu is 16 years with majority under 50. Many reasons have been suggested including older folks may have some residual cross-immunity from years of flu vaccination, milder disease in them, etc.

9:16 [Comment From Marc H]

Thanks...I think I feel OK, My kids seem to be a bit sick today....I returned on the 19th,

9:16 [Comment From Mark]

It seems that it would be extremely difficult to "sanitize" a school after an outbreak. How long should children actually be kept at home after a confirmed case of the flu?

9:16 Dr. Gupta: Another reason to encourage regular seasonal flu vaccine in children

9:17 Dr. Gupta: Marc: Watch your kids for flu-like illness, if so stay home from school, consider testing...

9:19 Dr. Gupta: It seems the virus (like many other viruses) survives only hours to days on inanimate objects (non-living). Hard to sanitize every surface. After confirmed case, consider 10-14 days home stay - till they are better.

9:19 Gary Harki: Can you take us through the process of identifying a sick person as having the swine flu? In other words, when someone comes in to get tested, what happens and how long until you know if they've been infected with this particular strain?

9:20 Dr. Gupta: OK, initial flu like illness can be any fever (100-104+) with either cough, sore throat, runny nose, gen body aches and the like (including headaches)....

9:21 Dr. Gupta: Many cases tend to be mild so you may consider at this staying home and NOT going to work/school

9:22 Dr. Gupta: If worsening like trouble breathing, cardiac issues or you already have pre-existing medical conditions or have been in contact with a known/suspected case, call ahead and visit your MD or ER as necessary...

9:22 Dr. Gupta: Your physician will then consider testing your for the flu and provide the necessary treatment

- 9:23** [Comment From Kim]
How long has it been since the last pandemic and how was it treated?
- 9:25** **Dr. Gupta:** The last well known was the 1918 one where over 50 million deaths worldwide occurred. However, the previous swine flu occurred at Fort Dix in NJ where 4 soldiers got sick and 1 died in 1976.
- 9:25** [Comment From John]
If this thing takes off like the pandemic of 1918, then the doctors, health care workers and public health officials will get sick too and the system will become overwhelmed. What's to stop a repeat of the 1918 pandemic, which killed an estimated 50 million people?
- 9:25** **Dr. Gupta:** Also remember, 200,000-500,000 people die each year from seasonal flu worldwide.
- 9:26** **Dr. Gupta:** Well, to begin with, we are more prepared than ever in the history of mankind for such an event...
- 9:27** **Dr. Gupta:** Preventing transmission of disease is one of the main elements to prevent morbidity and deaths. We hope to contain this and prevent it from a world wide event resembling such.
- 9:28** [Comment From Just Wondering]
Do you feel that the Mexican government is doing all it should to contain the outbreak? What about the possibility of future outbreaks? How can we be assured that stricter governmental regulations will be put in place to prevent this from happening again?
- 9:30** **Dr. Gupta:** First, let's applaud the Mexican Govt. for recognizing this relatively early and calling for help. Timely asking others for help was one of the smartest things it did. Then, they worked hard to contain it. In fact, figures coming out of there show plateauing of the disease there...
- 9:31** **Dr. Gupta:** There are always possibilities of future outbreaks. In fact, that's exactly how we can REALLY get in trouble. However, it's hard to fathom how you can regulate people's sanitary habits.
- 9:31** [Comment From Chris]
Do hand sanitizers really help?
- 9:32** **Dr. Gupta:** Yes, they seem to be as effective as hand washing as long as they contain 60% alcohol.
- 9:32** [Comment From Meg]
I heard on the local news that some pharmacies were selling out of their supply of Tamiflu - how could this help if in fact it isn't correct vaccine?
- 9:32** **Dr. Gupta:** Of course, one must know the proper hand washing technique
- 9:33** **Dr. Gupta:** Well, we know the virus is susceptible to Tamiflu and Relenza. However, indiscriminate use will eventually lead to resistance (just like for seasonal flu). Also, don't forget side effects.
- 9:34** [Comment From Chris]
Do you believe that the age range for flu shots should be changed in the future?
- 9:36** **Dr. Gupta:** Currently, the CDC recommends that all children aged 6 months up to their 19th birthday get a flu vaccine...
- 9:37** **Dr. Gupta:** Also, anyone over 50 should get it as well as between those ages if one has one of the chronic medical illnesses like DM, COPD, etc.
- 9:37** [Comment From Bill]
If you had a flu shot this year, does it mean that you are more protected from this strain than those who did not receive a shot?
- 9:38** **Dr. Gupta:** No, it seems that the current seasonal flu vaccine was very effective against the seasonal flu but is NOT at all effective against the H1N1.

- 9:38 [Comment From Marc H]**
Where does one get tested? We are in Ohio County? The Health Department?
- 9:39 Dr. Gupta:** You can ask your provider or the health dept to see if your satisfy the case definition to be tested. If so, they would have the test kits to send to the State Lab.
- 9:40 [Comment From Meghan]**
The fear of losing your job in this bad economy may fuel the chance of a real pandemic. The flu would be more widespread because fewer people would be willing to risk their jobs by staying home.
- 9:41 Dr. Gupta:** True, it's a reality. However, one hopes that the declaration of a Public Health Emergency by President Obama has more effect on all of us than just the words and we pitch in as a community to help those in need.
- 9:42 [Comment From Cindy]**
In your opinion, do you feel that our school boards are over-reacting on cancelling field trips? Isn't it better to be safer than sorry? It's hard to know how to balance hysteria and being overly cautious.
- 9:43 Dr. Gupta:** Well, I wouldn't recommend any blanket measure at this time including restricting all out-of-state travel and have been a proponent of deciding this on a case-by-case. This way we balance the kids needs including societal needs with the real threat of disease spread...
- 9:44 Dr. Gupta:** No one knows if we are over reacting or not. I hope we are, for everyone's sake!
- 9:44 [Comment From Richard]**
How would you rate Kanawha County's health department in its response to this health crisis?
- 9:46 Dr. Gupta:** So, you want me to rate myself and my dept. - I'd rather the folks do that, esp. after this is over. However, I will say that we are working hard, day and night to keep everyone up to date and prepare.
- 9:46 [Comment From John]**
Many experts believe the 1918 flu was so fatal because it sent victims' immune systems into overdrive, (a cytokine storm) essentially causing the body to kill itself. Does the current strain of the virus show the same characteristic?
- 9:48 Dr. Gupta:** No, even though that was also a H1N1 virus, the antigenic determinants are different. Also, some of the more dangerous enzymes seem to be absent from the H1N1 at this time as per the experts.
- 9:48 [Comment From Scuba Steve]**
Is it true that doctors agree that at some point, there will be another pandemic? I mean, if the swine flu does die off, at some point there is going to be a virus like the one in 1918, right?
- 9:50 Dr. Gupta:** One would like to be prepared for such an eventuality. Viruses are constantly undergoing recombination and evolving. So, it's hard to predict when it will happen and where! Hopefully, other countries are taking a cue from the current situation. Because, the global community MUST be prepared, not just us in case it did happen the way you suggest.
- 9:51 [Comment From Dave]**
What have you been doing to prepare for the swine flu at the health department?
- 9:53 Dr. Gupta:** We are engaged in educating with the public as well as our partners. We have met and provided guidance to Kanawha County Schools; communicating with EMS, first responders, providers, hospitals, Colleges/Universities, and others. Also, our staff has been extensively trained in pandemic influenza preparedness and response along with the CDC guidance for the past several years...
- 9:55 Dr. Gupta:** We are also constantly in communication with our partners at the State and monitoring the national situation continuously. Our website is updated daily: www.kchdvwv.org
- 9:55 [Comment From Ben]**

Is the reason this virus keeps spreading have anything to do with factory farming?

9:57 Dr. Gupta: Doubt it. In fact we have known about this virus since 1930. However, we usually detect 1-2 cases per year and had 12 from Dec 2005 to Feb 2008. Pigs routinely get this during the fall season at farms. Somehow this time, the virus has figured out a way to jump from human to human!

9:58 [Comment From Daniel]

I don't understand the huge amount of hoopla over the swine flu. I do understand that no one has natural immunity and all that good stuff, but is all the hype legit or just media sensationalism?

10:00 Dr. Gupta: It is of genuine concern that a novel virus has figured out how to jump from animal to human and then humans to humans. One option would be that it gets limited here. Other would be that it has extensive spread but mild to moderate disease. The worst case scenario would be if it finds a way to mutate and become a lot deadlier than at this time. I think many times, the media tends to make you want to focus on the last option most of the time.

10:01 Gary Harki: We have time for two more questions...

10:01 [Comment From Joe]

Shouldn't regular businesses be getting information from the Health Department as well as schools, hospitals, etc. that have a large number of employees? Other than hand sanitizers, staying home when sick (although definitely not encouraged by most companies), should other types of precautions be taken?

10:04 Dr. Gupta: At this time you have already mentioned the type of precautions to take. I am working emphatically to get folks to our website so they can find a one stop for all info everyday, rather than be bombarded with paper or emails. However, we will be trying to develop an e-mail network with the community businesses in the near future as well. We are developing a website just for this flu: www.kchdvw.org/H1N1

10:04 Gary Harki: Dr. Gupta has answered all the submitted questions, so here is one from Gazette reporter Ken Ward Jr. ...

10:04 [Comment From kenwardjr]

Isn't there evidence in the literature that having thousands of animals living in confined spaces -- often with poor ventilation -- allows these bugs to spread more easily?

10:04 [Comment From kenwardjr]

Public radio's Living on Earth (www.loe.org) carried a piece about this last week, which included an interview with Ellen Silbergeld from Johns Hopkins. She said:

10:04 [Comment From kenwardjr]

These operations contain elements that really are conducive to raising concerns for public health. You have thousands of animals, in the case of pigs usually between two and six thousand animals, held in close confinement under conditions that are not sanitary, that is frankly that they're housed with their wastes. And therefore you've got a lot of hosts available to exchange a pathogen, which is one of the processes by which viruses and bacteria evolve and acquire mutations. And then the way in which these operations are run -- and I want to stress that this is a worldwide issue, it is not peculiar or restricted to Mexico.

10:06 Dr. Gupta: You make sense, overcrowding is a concern whether in pigs, chickens or Humans! However, I don't know the data in this regard.

10:07 Dr. Gupta: Thank you everyone for your participation. I look forward to more chats in the future. Have a good day!

10:08 Gary Harki: This concludes our live chat with Dr. Gupta. We want to thank him once again. Kanawha County Prosecutor Mark Plants will be online Wednesday, May 13 at 9 a.m. to take questions.