

Guidelines for Swine-flu in the event of a pandemic outbreak

(adapted from Hindu Forum of Britain advice sheet).

What is Swine-flu? Swine-flu is a type of influenza caused by a virus subtype H1N1 believed to have originated from swine. It passes with apparent ease from human to human by physical contact, coughing or sneezing. The World Health Organization has stated that symptoms may even be less severe than seasonal influenza symptoms. Currently, there is no known vaccine to prevent Swine-flu. Medical researchers worldwide recognize that the Swine-flu virus can mutate into something more deadly. Therefore, Governments are carefully watching the latest 2009 outbreak of Swine-flu and making contingency plans for a possible global pandemic.

How is Swine-flu spread? Like any other influenza, Swine-flu spreads between humans through coughing or sneezing and people touching something with the virus on it and then touching their own nose or mouth. The swine flu in humans is most contagious during the first five days of the illness although some people, most commonly children, can remain contagious for up to ten days.

How can people be at risk? Some ways Swine-flu can be spread are:

- Public gatherings and worship in temples and temple services
- Private gatherings in houses for meditation
- Public celebrations
- Weddings and family celebrations
- General public spaces like schools, work, libraries, gyms, shops and public transport

Whilst close contact with others in a confined space, community centre or house can accelerate Swine-flu, there is little direct evidence of the benefits of cancelling such gatherings among healthy people. You will need to assess the risk according to government advice and local conditions, while taking into account the needs of your community centre.

How can we prevent the spread of the virus? As in any situation where people come into close contact, good hygiene precautions should be adhered to. Some simple measures will help.

Prevention at home:

- Use a tissue to cover your nose and mouth when coughing and/or sneezing.
- Dispose of the tissue promptly and then wash your hands.
- Clean hands frequently with soap and water, especially after coughing, sneezing, and using tissues. Microbicidal handrubs can be used as an alternative, but some of these may contain alcohol, which some Hindus may not like to handle.
- Minimise touching your mouth, eyes and/or nose, unless you have recently cleaned your hands.
- Clean surfaces frequently touched by hands; normal household detergent and water will be adequate for this.
- Clean your hands as soon as you arrive home.
- If you suspect or have been diagnosed of Swine-flu, it would be best to stay at home

Prevention at gatherings

- Ensure that hand hygiene facilities are adequate and working properly.
 - Consider installing automatic or foot-operated taps, dryers and waste bins. Ensure that you have stocks of tissues, paper towels and soaps in bathrooms and toilets for use during public gatherings.
 - Consider how you might use hand cleansers, for example at the entrances to rooms or sites without hand-washing facilities.
 - Check that you have procedures for isolating (with appropriate supervision) anyone who falls ill
- Avoid catching others and wash your hands immediately if you have done so.

- Sharing of common vessels for food and drink should be avoided
- Those living and working in temples should avoid spreading the virus to healthy residents by introducing strict infection control measures.

For updates on the situation:

- Directgov: www.direct.gov.uk/swineflu
Tel: 0800 1 513 513
- England: www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk Tel: 0845 4647
- Scotland: www.nhs24.com Tel: 08454 242424
- Wales: www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk Tel: 0845 4647

For guidelines on how to deal with Pandemic Influenza:

Download the Department for Communities and Local Government's leaflet offering guidance for faith communities at: www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/influenzapandemic