

# Public Health: it's an emergency but no need to panic

Do pigs fly? While the world worries about a pandemic of bird flu, swine flu has taken everyone by surprise.

The Spanish, apparently, eat more pork than any other nation. So it is logical to assume that Mexico has a healthy pork addiction, too.

For those that have already responded to the threat of bird flu, the good news about the sudden emergence of swine flu is that it responds to Tamiflu. The bad news is that, after the bird flu fears, there's a whole load of fake Timiflu in the supply chain.

The disease, which on some Mexican estimates has infected 1400 people of which 86 have died, has spread to Canada, the USA (of course) and New Zealand.

Fearing a SARS style epidemic, airports are re-installing temperature monitors to identify feverish patients.

But the World Health Organisation has little comfort for those trying to understand how it is spread - as yet the conditions for transmissibility between humans are not identified.

The USA has shipped millions of doses of drugs to distribution centres. And in Mexico, millions of face masks have been distributed.

The speed with which the disease has spread is startling: the 1400 suspected cases have developed in the two weeks since 13th April.

New Zealand's problems arose from two groups of students - travelling independently of each

other. Both groups had members who had contracted the virus.

China and Taiwan - where pork is a major industry as well as a part of the diet - are planning to quarantine travellers from affected areas if there are any signs of infection. Other countries are expected to follow suit.

Brazil is the latest country to report cases but more are expected in the coming hours and days.

The USA declared an emergency - that's required so that federal authorities can release the medicines (which are not vaccines - no vaccine is available) - but told people that was not a cause for panic.

In the meantime, it is questioning travellers on symptoms and travel history - so expect even longer queues at US airports.