



NEWSRELEASE

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FOR RELEASE: April 29, 2009

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COMMISSIONER OF AGRICULTURE AFFIRMS THAT PORK PRODUCTS ARE SAFE AND THAT CONSUMERS CANNOT CONTRACT THE H1N1 VIRUS BY EATING PORK PRODUCTS

Todd Haymore, Commissioner of the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS), has affirmed the statement of Secretary Vilsack of the U.S. Department of Agriculture about the safety of pork products. "I want to reiterate what Secretary Vilsack said on three key points," said Haymore. "One, there is no evidence at this time that U.S. swine have been infected with this virus. Two, our pork and pork products are safe to eat. And three, our Virginia pork producers are very consistent and thorough in their bio-security practices to prevent the introduction or spread of disease. We have a comprehensive surveillance system in Virginia and in the United States to monitor animal health, and our producers and processors all know it is in their best interest to adhere to a strict program of bio-security."

According to Haymore, this routine bio-security encompasses every aspect of pork production, from controlling access to the farms where hogs are raised to disinfecting footwear and equipment that come into contact with animals on a farm. "Farmers wear protective boots and coveralls going into an area with the animals and discard them in a barrel upon leaving," said Haymore. "They want to be certain that they don't track anything onto or off of the farm."

He added that state and federal agriculture officials and laboratories have put together a surveillance plan for monitoring influenza cases in swine. Unusual or atypical cases of swine influenza must be reported daily to the USDA. Any unusual strains found are to be sent to the National Veterinary Services Laboratories (NVSL) for typing and comparison to this H1N1 human strain. Also, any cases of influenza in swine that are associated with influenza-like illnesses in humans working with the swine are to be forwarded to NVSL as well.

Some important points to remember about the current outbreak of the H1N1 virus:

- There have been no reports of this virus in swine, according to scientists at USDA.
- It appears that no exposure to swine has occurred among people who have come down with the current H1N1 virus. The currently circulating virus has elements of human, swine and avian viruses normally found in Europe or Asia but has no known human-swine connection.
- People cannot get the flu virus from eating pork or pork products.
- Swine flu viruses are not transmitted by food; in fact, cooking pork to an internal temperature of 160° F kills all viruses and other foodborne pathogens.
- Eating properly handled and cooked pork or pork products is safe.
- Swine flu is really a misnomer with historical roots but little biological basis. The term swine flu was first used almost 100 years ago when an outbreak of the Spanish flu caused significant mortality in both swine and human populations. The origin of that virus is unknown but was likely caused by wild birds. The term swine flu, however incorrect, has been in use ever since. The Office International des Epizooties (OIE), the international organization that manages the fight against animal diseases globally, said that the flu virus now spreading around the world would more accurately be called North American influenza rather than swine flu

based on its geographic origin and because it contains avian and human components and no pig has been found ill.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has posted this statement on its Web site (www.cdc.gov/swineflu): "Swine influenza viruses are not spread by food. You cannot get swine influenza from eating pork or pork products. Eating properly handled and cooked pork products is safe." The CDC and other health organizations continue to caution that the virus is contagious and is spreading from humans to humans. The CDC has said it has not found any evidence to indicate that any of the illnesses resulted from contact with pigs. Nonetheless, the National Pork Board is encouraging pork producers to maintain strict biosecurity procedures on their farms.

"Our colleagues at the Virginia Department of Health are encouraging people to take common-sense measures to prevent the flu, and we fully support that," concluded Haymore, "but we also want consumers to know that VDH is not cautioning people to give up eating pork products." For more information on the H1N1 flu virus, see www.vdh.state.va.us or www.pandemicflu.gov.

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