

Don't call it "Swine Flu"

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It is rather unfortunate that pigs have been wrongly associated with the 2009 and the more recent outbreak of the 'flu in Jamaicans. Unfortunate, because as veterinarians who ascribe to **One Health** we are intimate in the knowledge of zoonotic spread of diseases i.e. transmission of vertebrate animal diseases to man via vectors or mechanical means. Who more than the veterinarian, the swine producer, the barn worker or the slaughter house worker to be first exposed to and affected/infected with diseases of animal origin?

Recently having suffered symptoms of "the 'flu" my 8 y.o. asked if I had brought home the Swine 'flu as "...you work with pigs mommy". I was at great pains to explain to both children that Biosecurity in effect at the farm would make it impossible for their mum to be a vector of Swine 'flu and neither mum nor the pigs are a cause for the 'flu which all, except dad were affected.

So to share with you, as done with the children, there are many causes of respiratory diseases in pigs, including influenza (the 'flu). Influenza Type A viruses are the only known respiratory viruses known to infect pigs. H1N1, H1N2 and H3N2 are the three main Type A viruses affecting pigs. These don't usually infect people and are different genetically from the H1N1 and H3N2 commonly circulated in people.

Of note too, the influenza virus in pigs has very similar signs as in humans i.e. Coughing, sneezing, high fevers, a mucous discharge from the nose (snout) and going off feed...sounding familiar? Pigs may become infected with the flu viruses **from you the human and from birds!** It is this cross species spread and "mixing" of 'flu viruses that leads to new and variant viruses that now cause spread among people. So if you are found with 'flu like symptoms stay away from the pigs until you are fever-free for at least 24 hours.



The 2009 and the more recent 2015/16 H1N1 was first detected in humans. Unfortunately because the virus bore similarities to that found in pigs, the erroneous nomenclature of **Swine Influenza** was awarded. The take home message: almost all influenza cases in humans are caused by human 'flu viruses **NOT** swine-associated viruses.