

SWINE FLU: Filtering fact from fiction about face masks

“Face masks need filters to provide optimal protection from swine flu”

Southampton, UK: - People who want to take extra precautions against swine flu should look for masks with built-in filters, according to Dr Robin J Harman, a pharmaceutical and regulatory expert, “There has been much debate about the benefits of wearing a mask to prevent infection with swine flu. Ordinary surgical masks provide some protection from airborne particles, but the UK Department of Health has stated that ‘basic face masks don’t protect people from becoming infected’.¹ However, masks with built-in particle filters that are CE marked and meet the European Standard class FFP3 have efficiency of 99% or more.” A **filtering face piece (FFP3)** device is a mask that provides a high level of filtering capability and face fit, and generates an effective barrier to both droplets and fine aerosols.

Swine flu virus is spread when miniscule droplets emitted by coughing and sneezing or deposited on hands and surfaces reach the nose or mouth. If you block the particles from being inhaled, for example, with a mask with a built-in particle filter, you can help reduce your risks of becoming infected.

A scientific study has shown that 20-85% of virus particles can penetrate two ordinary types of surgical mask, and potentially expose the wearer to infection². But masks with **FFP3 respirators**, such as the Covafly FFP3 face mask, will block more than 99% of airborne virus droplets that are 0.3 microns in size – the majority of swine flu-infected droplets will be larger than this.

UK manufacturer, Clinova, has seen a surge in demand in the past week for Covafly FFP3 masks, which meet World Health Organisation and the UK Health and Safety Executive standards for use in influenza pandemics. “Our Covafly masks meet the highest criteria for preventing harmful particles entering the system, which could result in infection. We have increased production significantly to meet demand and set up a special order form on our website, so that people who want to take extra measures to protect themselves in a pandemic will have access to the best possible protective masks,” said Jim Tremouliaris, Director of Clinova Ltd.

Covafly FFP3 masks are available at all good pharmacies. They can be ordered online at www.clinova.co.uk or by telephoning 08452590175.

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Notes to Editors:

The Health Protection Agency has advised that there are some circumstances where wearing a facemask may be beneficial:

- reducing the risk of passing on infection - people with flu wearing a facemask when they are in contact with other people; or
- reducing the risk of getting an infection; healthy people wearing a facemask when they are caring for a patient with flu.

The wearing of facemasks by healthy individuals who are not involved in caring for people who are ill (i.e. the general public) is not recommended by the HPA. However, it is recognised that some people may choose to do so.

A **filtering face piece (FFP3)** device is a mask which is certified to the PPE Directive. It provides a high level of filtering capability and face fit. It can be supplied with an exhale valve so that it can be worn comfortably over a fairly long period of time. It will provide an effective barrier to both droplets and fine aerosols and is the type recommended particularly for people in the healthcare sector dealing with symptomatic patients undergoing treatment where aerosols are likely to be generated. For instructions on appropriate fit and usage, please read the manufacturers enclosed information leaflet, supplied with the purchase of every mask.

Although wearing FFP3 respiratory face masks provides protection from airborne contamination, it does not guarantee full immunity against swine flu. The Department of Health advises that in the case of a flu pandemic, a combination of an FFP3 face mask, eye goggles and gloves should be used. In addition, unnecessary travel should be minimized or avoided, unless absolutely essential, and people should be wearing all the essential Personal Protection.

Clinova Ltd is a pharmaceutical group focused on developing, manufacturing and marketing a broad range of pharmaceutical products and diagnostic devices. Clinova has its global headquarters in Southampton.

References

1. Department of Health leaflet, 30 April 2009, *Important information about swine fever*.
2. Balazy A, Toivola M, Adhikari A. *Am J Infect Control* 2006;34, 51 – 57.