Do swine and people get influenza?
All subtypes of influenza A virus have zoonotic potential. Influenza A viruses are shared between humans and pigs. The most common subtypes found in both humans and pigs are H1N1, H3N2, and H1N2.

Humans have passed new and diverse influenza viruses to pigs for decades and pigs are ideal candidates for reassortment of influenza viruses. Reassortment creates optimal conditions for influenza pandemics like the H1N1 outbreak that occurred in 2009. Since human-to-swine transmission is common and swine-to-human transmission is known to occur, it is very important for pig farms to maintain strict biosecurity protocols for those entering their facilities.

What do the letters, numbers, and names mean?
There are three “types” of influenza viruses—A, B, and C. Influenza A viruses are characterized by their subtype. The “subtypes” are based on the types of proteins that cover the surface of the virus: H (hemagglutinin) and N (neuraminidase). Among influenza A viruses, 18 different subtypes of the H protein and 11 different subtypes of the N protein exist. H1N1, H3N2, and H1N2 flu viruses are all subtypes of influenza A viruses and these subtypes are common in humans and swine. Seasonal influenza is the name applied the strains of influenza that cause respiratory illness in humans every year. Seasonal influenza spreads between people and can cause mild to severe illness. When swine viruses infect humans, they are considered “variant” viruses. For example H3N2v, a swine virus that can infect people, is different from H3N2 human seasonal influenza virus. The names “variant” and “seasonal” are used to distinguish between known zoonotic influenza viruses, and influenza viruses causing seasonal respiratory disease in humans.

How are influenza viruses spread?
Influenza viruses are spread via coughing, sneezing, and touching contaminated surfaces and then touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Influenza viruses can also spread via aerosols in particular when in close proximity with infected hosts.

The most common way for a human to get infected with influenza virus is from another human.

What are the signs and symptoms of flu in humans?
The signs and symptoms of influenza infections in people can include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Occasionally people report nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea. Severe illnesses and deaths have occurred, however, it is expected that most people will recover without needing medical care.

Severe illness can occur if you are in a group at high risk for flu complications (e.g. pregnant, elderly, infants or have a chronic medical condition).

Can I get infected with influenza virus from eating or preparing pork?
No. Influenza viruses have not been shown to be transmitted to people through eating properly prepared pork.

What can I do to protect myself from getting the flu?
For Minnesotans, seasonal flu activity generally occurs from November to March. The best way to prevent the flu is to get the seasonal flu vaccine and avoid contact with infected people. Contact your healthcare provider with questions or concerns.

How can I prevent the spread of the flu?
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Safely dispose of the tissue in the trash after you use it. If you don’t have a tissue, use the inside of your elbow instead of your hands to cover your nose and mouth.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- Stay home if you are sick and until you are fever-free for 24 hours. This is to keep from infecting others and spreading the virus further.
Is it O.K. to visit the swine barn at a fair?
People at high risk, as listed above, for developing more severe complications from influenza should be discouraged from entering swine holding areas.

Pigs and people can become infected from sick people. People with influenza-like illness should stay away from pigs until they are fever-free for at least 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medication.

Additional Information:
- Flu.gov
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- Minnesota Department of Health

This fact sheet is meant to provide basic information. For specific health concerns please contact your physician or veterinarian. Updated April 2015.