

THE SWINE FLU AND CHINESE HERBAL MEDICINE

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As of this writing (April 30, 2009) we are all concerned about the possibility of a swine flu pandemic. Oriental medicine actually has a very good track record with treating a wide variety of respiratory viruses. When SARS hit a few years back, it was strict precautionary measures and Chinese herbal medicine that got Asia through the crisis. We offer this paper to the Oriental Medicine community to help empower us to deal with the questions we face.

What Are the Symptoms to Watch for?

The Centers for Disease Control has stated that the symptoms for swine flu are to be considered “similar to regular human seasonal influenza and include fever, lethargy, lack of appetite and coughing. Some people with swine flu also have reported runny nose, sore throat, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea.”

What Is the Pathogenesis of Swine Flu?

Unlike the common cold, which attaches to the adenoids, the influenza virus attaches to the lung tissue itself. The lungs become inflamed and the body reacts with “flu-like symptoms.” Incubation for most influenza viruses are from 1-4 days. It is not yet known for certain whether the swine flu follows the same incubation pattern.

What Is the Contagious Phase for Swine Flu?

As of the writing of this paper, this information is not certain. In the absence of certainty we must act upon the assumption that the contagious phase of swine flu will behave much like that of other influenza viruses. In other influenza viruses a person is contagious from about 1 day before the onset of symptoms up to 7 days after the symptoms appear. Children can be contagious up to one week after the fever has dispersed.

Why Is the Swine Flu so Dangerous?

Much of the answer to this question is conjecture, but we believe this: Most of the influenza viruses we encounter during regular “flu season” are variants of viruses we have already adapted to. It may be easier for our bodies to figure out how to respond to a variant compared to a more radical mutation. It has been hypothesized that the reason young and healthy people are more susceptible to extreme reactions to swine flu is that their immune response may be more extreme. This may also be why some infected with swine flu develop vomiting and diarrhea, even though influenza is a respiratory virus. The gastrointestinal response may be the body’s panic mode while attempting to expel the pathogen. But this explanation remains a hypothesis. From an OM perspective, if there is vomiting and diarrhea, then the energetic of the digestive system is involved and needs to be addressed. It should be borne in mind, however, that getting the digestive response under control should be viewed as treating the symptom, while the cause is likely to remain in the lungs.

What Can We as OM Practitioners Do for our Patients?

The answer is: *We can do alot!* Before a discussion of treatment options, it is essential that we all understand our public obligation. Under the current situation—and whenever there is a possibility of an pandemic outbreak—all health practitioners are obligated to identify the virus. If you do not have the proper kit in your office (and most of us do not) you are obligated

to refer any patients that present with fever, cough, lethargy, (general flu-like symptoms) to a clinic or agency with the means of identifying the specific virus involved. This is not an option nor a recommendation, but an obligation.

You do not have to delay treatment while the virus is being identified. Chinese herbal medicine offers many effective options to treat the swine flu (and any type of influenza.)

OM TREATMENT OPTIONS FOR SWINE FLU

It is best to break down treatment options into phases. What works during one phase will be minimally effective in another, and in some cases downright harmful. The three phases are: *Prevention Phase, Initial Exposure Phase, Fully Engaged Phase.*

PREVENTION PHASE

Prior to exposure, it is possible and recommended to support the immune system in order to prevent the virus of a future exposure from forming full attachment. A strong immune system is characterized by a firm and well-regulated exterior. The *wei* (defensive) qi can be supported in two ways with herbal medicine: directly and through the *yuan* (source) qi. In the young and the strong, direct support is usually preferable. In patients over age 40 or patients who have weaker immune systems, it is often preferable to support not only the *wei* qi, but the *yuan* qi as well. The Prevention Phase formulas are only effective prior to the onset of symptoms. These formulas, if administered after the onset of symptoms can strengthen the pathogen as well as intensify the body’s response.

Prevention Phase Formulas

Jade Windscreen Formula (*Yu Ping Feng San*) directly supports the *wei* qi, supports immune function, and firms up the exterior against invasion.

Astragalus Formula (*Huang Qi Jian Zhong Tang*) also directly supports the *wei* qi. It is designed for patients with weak spleen qi. It is an excellent choice for pediatrics during the prevention phase, but anyone with weak spleen qi can benefit from this formula.

Astragalus and Ligustrum Formula (*Huang Qi Dong Qing Pian*) is one of the formulas we recommend for supporting the *wei* qi through the *yuan* qi. It is based on *fuzheng* therapy, which means “support the normal (or upright) qi” therapy. This formula is ideal for elderly patients or those with weakened immune systems. Many of the ingredients are classified in the West as adaptogens. Its OM actions include strengthening spleen and *wei* qi, nourishing the kidney and blood, and retaining essence.

Five Mushroom Formula (*Wu Gu Fang*). The power certain mushrooms possess to kill viruses and support the immune system is widely accepted. The mushrooms in **Five Mushroom Formula** are among the strongest known. Any

age or constitution can benefit from their healing properties.

Ginseng Endurance Formula (*Ren Shen Pian*). Originally designed to enhance athletic performance, this formula is quite effective for either the direct support of the *wei qi* or support through the *yuan qi*. Nearly every ingredient in this formula is classified as an adaptogen. It supports *yuan qi*, *wei qi* and kidney. Among the 5 formulas that we recommend for the Prevention Phase, **Ginseng Endurance Formula** is the most effective for patients who suffer from real exhaustion.

INITIAL EXPOSURE PHASE

If exposure is certain or probable, there is a little time to try and kill the virus before it has a chance to reach full strength replication. The incubation period of most influenza is from 1-4 days before symptoms begin. What we can use from this knowledge is that we probably have at least one day, possibly more, to try and kill the virus after a known or suspected exposure.

Sometimes, if no symptoms have yet developed, Prevention Phase formulas can still be used with good effect, especially those like **Five Mushroom Formula**, that actively kill viruses while they boost the immune system. During the Initial Exposure Phase, you can also combine, to the same effect as **Five Mushroom Formula**, other Prevention Phase formulas with Initial Exposure Phase formulas. Initial Exposure Phase formulas can be used effectively if symptoms are limited to a tickle in the throat, mild lethargy, slight loss of appetite, or body aches.

Once the virus reaches the lung tissue, however, or if symptoms do not abate within the first 24 hours of use, it is recommended to switch to a Fully Engaged Phase formula or to combine Initial Exposure Phase formulas with Fully Engaged Phase formulas. After the Initial Exposure Phase, the value of Initial Exposure Phase formulas is limited when used alone. The reason for this limitation is that the antiviral action by itself only serves to inhibit the replication of the virus once it is fully engaged with the lung organ. They do not dislodge the virus from the lung tissue, nor do they regulate the body's immune response to the pathogen. And, as we suggested above, it is possible that the regulation of the body's immune response to the pathogen may be the key to survival.

Initial Exposure Phase Formulas

Adrographis Formula (*Chuan Xin Lian Kang Yan Pian*) is a powerful antiviral and general antimicrobial formula. It is exceptionally effective against viruses that attack the throat, intestines, or urinary tract, making it an ideal choice for a viral strain that affects both the upper respiratory and digestive systems.

Zhong Gan Ling Formula was developed in modern China by combining herbs that have demonstrable anti-viral actions. It is highly effective against even tenacious viruses like influenza when it is used in the Initial Exposure Phase. It is similar to **Gan Mao Ling**, but more versatile, since it is not as cold as the latter and its antiviral action travels into more channels. Since influenza attacks virtually the same systems every time and is almost always a warm disease, both **Zhong Gan Ling** and **Gan Mao Ling** can be used with equal effectiveness.

Gan Mao Ling Formula is similar to **Zhong Gan Ling** in action. Both are powerful antiviral formulas, but **Gan Mao Ling** is colder and stronger to clear heat.

Viola Clear Fire Formula (*Di Ding Qing Huo Pian*) is high-

ly effective against a wide variety of viruses, bacteria, and even fungi. Its mild, balanced quality makes it an excellent choice for children and for those who have a history of pneumonia or chronic respiratory infection.

Yin Chiao Formula is quite well known for its ability to expel viruses while they are still in the exterior. It can be used in the treatment of swine flu in the Initial Exposure Phase as long as the pulse is superficial and some improvement can be observed in the condition while taking the formula.

FULLY ENGAGED PHASE

As stated above, what distinguishes the Fully Engaged Phase physiologically is the attachment of the virus to the lung tissue. Viral replication has reached peak production, and the body's immune response is now occupying or even consuming all available qi. The most common or characteristic symptoms are racing pulse, headache, significant loss of appetite, high fever, pronounced fatigue/weakness, chest discomfort with or without cough, and sometimes body aches. Other, less frequent symptoms can include sore throat, sinus symptoms, diarrhea, or vomiting. At this phase, antiviral formulas (Initial Exposure Phase Formulas) alone will have limited effect because their action is to drain heat and clear toxin, not to disperse heat or dislodge the attachment. Antiviral formulas have little effect on regulating the body's immune response and so, do very little to improve such symptoms as headache, body aches, lethargy, and chest symptoms. Fully Engaged Phase Formulas are required in order to disperse heat and regulate the body's immune response.

Fully Engaged Phase Formulas

Xie Bai San (4110)* is an excellent formula to relax attachment between the lung tissue and the virus. It treats constrained lung heat and rectifies lung qi. It is appropriate to treat influenza of any type as long as the pulse is racing. It is also safe for children. Once **Xie Bai San** has succeeded in improving the condition, it can be combined with one of the antiviral (Initial Exposure Phase) formulas to finish off the virus.

Da Chai Hu Tang w/o Da Huang (0320B)* treats influenza when it is simultaneously in the shao yang and yang ming stages. The main signs/symptoms include fullness or tightness in the chest, alternating chills and fever, and vomiting. It is not very effective against diarrhea.

Huo Xiang Zheng Qi San (4200)* is appropriate when the chief manifestations are vomiting and/or diarrhea. If the stomach is especially sensitive, it is often a challenge to keep formulas down. **Huo Xiang Zheng Qi San** can be administered a single tablet (or 1/8 teaspoon) with a little warm water every 30-40 minutes until the patient is able to take a larger dose. These symptoms are rare with common human seasonal influenza, but is apparently more frequent with the swine flu variant.

Ren Shen Xie Fei Tang (0040)* is the strongest in this list to rectify the lung qi. Use if bronchitis or pneumonia are developing or in the case of marked phlegm production.

There is also a Critical Phase of the swine flu that should not go unmentioned. If a patient becomes critical or if the formulas do not seem to be helping, he or she should be admitted to a hospital where they can be more closely monitored.

* The number following the formula name indicates item number for the KPC granular formulas. If you prefer tablets and they are available, the number is preceded by the letter "S".