

Swine flu fear invades Twitter

by UPI

WASHINGTON -- The swine flu outbreak is showing the best and worst of Twitter, the highly popular micro-blogging site, Internet experts said.

Some say Twitter -- where users post 140-character messages -- is filled with misinformation and is sparking fear about the outbreak, believed to have killed nearly 150 people in Mexico, CNN reported Tuesday.

Twitter's popularity has exploded in recent months and nearly 10 times more people are writing on Twitter about swine flu than wrote about the salmonella and peanut butter scares this winter, Nielsen Online reported Monday.

"Bad news always travels faster than good news. I'm sure that was true in smoke signal days," said Al Tomkins, who teaches broadcast and online news at the Poynter Institute.

Tomkins advises people seeking information from Twitter, and the rest of the Internet, to look to the most knowledgeable sources, including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which maintains a Twitter account where government information is given directly to the public.

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