A complication of H1N1 influenza A “swine” flu
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Clinical
This 22-year-old asthmatic patient presented with cough, fever, chest pains and was diagnosed with H1N1 influenza A swine lineage upper respiratory tract infection.
On examination the patient had a positive Hamman’s sign—a crackling sound heard in synchrony with the heartbeat.
A chest radiograph (Figure 1) and CT scan of the thorax (Figure 2) were performed.

What is the diagnosis?
Answer

Pneumomediastinum and subcutaneous emphysema.

The chest radiograph shows subcutaneous emphysema (arrow 1), which was also evident on clinical examination, and pneumomediastinum (arrow 2).
The CT scan demonstrates the appearance of subcutaneous emphysema in the upper thorax (arrow 3).

Discussion

Hamman’s sign is a crunching or crackling sound heard over the precordium. It was first described in patients with Hamman’s syndrome—the association between spontaneous subcutaneous emphysema, pneumomediastinum, and pain.\(^1\)

Swine flu posed a challenge to public health systems in New Zealand at an early phase in the global pandemic.\(^2\)
Pneumomediastinum as a complication of swine flu was first described in one patient in the original cohort of Mexican patients,\(^3\) and has since been described in another two patients from Japan.\(^4\)

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References: