

Swine Flu

Staff Update

10 August 2009

I attended a Pandemic Flu Planning conference at the end of July, at which the speakers included Professor Hugh Pennington of Aberdeen University. This update is based on the key messages from the conference and is intended to put the current swine flu pandemic into perspective.

- There is a 'background' level of seasonal flu permanently present in the population. Every few years a variant comes along which increases the numbers of people who catch flu – this year it is Swine Flu (the H1N1 virus). Because it has spread rapidly around the world it is referred to as a pandemic.
- The Swine Flu virus is milder, with a lower attack rate (ie slower spread, fewer complications, fewer hospitalisations, lower levels of absenteeism) than the Government's previous pandemic planning assumptions.
- The virus is spread through sneezing and coughing by an infected person. The risk of infecting others can be reduced by using a tissue and binning it after one use, and by regular hand washing.
- The National Pandemic Flu Service has been set up in England as a first line response, to take the pressure off NHS Direct and GPs. People displaying the symptoms who have serious underlying health conditions, pregnant women, children under one or children whose condition suddenly gets worse, and people who are still getting worse after 7 days should contact their GP.
- GPs are coping at present in Scotland and Wales.

Swine Flu Issues

Issue	Response
Hand wash gels	Regular hand washing is recommended. Using soap and water is every bit as effective as hand gel and there is no need for the FC to purchase supplies of hand gel.
Face masks	Face masks are completely worthless as a means of protection against catching the virus.
Additional cleaning of office environment	When exposed to the air, the virus dies naturally within about 12 hours. Since most office cleaning takes place in the evenings extra cleaning would not provide any additional protection for staff.

Anti Viral drugs	If taken within 48 hours of symptoms appearing, Tamiflu and Relenza should help relieve some of the symptoms, reduce the duration of the illness by up to a day and reducing the potential for more serious complications. Overall, they should help stop the spread of the virus.
Vaccination	The new vaccine referred to in the media (which should become available in the next couple of months) will protect against H1N1 only. Normal seasonal flu vaccine offers protection against a range of viruses.
Pregnancy	Pregnant women are more likely to become infected, as their immune system is suppressed during pregnancy. However, they should carry on as normal unless symptoms occur.

HR is continuing to monitor developments and will update as appropriate the general advice for staff and managers which is available on the Swine Flu pages of [eConnect](#).

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