

Media Release

16 August 2010

Pandemic Influenza H1N1 2009 (swine flu) – Update 120

With the increase in influenza H1N1 currently circulating the Ministry will now be providing public updates twice weekly.

There have been 389 hospitalisations of lab-confirmed pandemic influenza H1N1 this year to date in New Zealand, including 10 people currently in intensive care. There have been a total of 59 admissions to intensive care so far this year. These figures do not include influenza-like illness among people admitted to hospital without a positive H1N1 lab test result.

So far this year there have been six deaths reported as linked to swine flu - four of these deaths are currently being considered by the Coroner and so are not yet considered as confirmed as swine flu deaths.

Healthline handled around 1400 calls each day during the weekend of all types. Average call volumes are running nearly 35 per cent higher than normal seasonal levels. Calls requiring an assessment of influenza-like illness make up about a quarter of daily call volume.

Schools are reporting routine levels of children being away from school due to illness - based on information from sentinel schools around the country, at the end of last week no region was reporting average sickness rates above 15%. The absenteeism rates in Wairarapa schools now appear to be returning to normal levels.

Protecting yourself and others

For some people, influenza can be a very serious illness. The basic measures to protect yourself and others remain the same, but are more important as we see more influenza circulating in the community:

know the symptoms of influenza, which can include a high fever, headache, cough, sore throat, tiredness and generally aching all over

phone for medical advice quickly (call your GP or Healthline on 0800 611 116) if you have influenza-like symptoms, including consideration of whether you need antiviral medicine treatment. Antiviral medication may lessen the severity and length of your illness, but is best started within the first 48 hours. Antiviral treatment is currently available free of charge on prescription.

seeking early medical advice is especially important for women who are pregnant, severely overweight people and those with underlying medical conditions such as asthma, diabetes, cancer, heart and lung disease and other conditions including autoimmune diseases

wash and dry hands frequently, cover coughs and sneezes and stay home if you are sick.

if you haven't yet been immunised, there are still small numbers of influenza vaccine (6400 doses) still available. While these are likely to run out by the end of August, the Ministry is looking at options for extending immunisation while demand continues. It's important to book in to get immunised now, as it takes up to a fortnight for the vaccine to offer its full level of protection. Young children also need a longer time as they require two doses a month apart to be assured of best protection. Immunisation is especially recommended for those at greatest risk of complications from H1N1 influenza, including women who are pregnant, very young children, severely overweight people and those with underlying medical conditions.

More information can be found on the Ministry of Health's Influenza webpages at:
<http://www.moh.govt.nz/influenza-a-h1n1>.

ENDS

Please attribute this statement to Dr Mark Jacobs, Director of Public Health. For more information contact Peter Abernethy 021 366 111

For health information and advice, call Healthline 0800 611 116.

For latest updates on Pandemic Influenza H1N1 2009 (swine flu), visit <http://www.moh.govt.nz>.

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For media queries, call the National Health Coordination Centre, Communications Desk at +64 (021) 243 6805 or email H1N1comms@moh.govt.nz