

Pandemic flu update 27th July 2009

Pandemic flu cases are still increasing substantially in many countries, even those which have been affected for some time. A top priority has been to identify those who may be at highest risk of serious diseases to enable steps to be taken to protect them.

In most countries the majority of pandemic flu cases are occurring in younger people with an average age of 12 – 17 years. Some evidence suggests those more seriously affected may be slightly older.

The Department of Health has identified the following as a greater risk of becoming more seriously ill from swine flu than others:

People with:

- ? Chronic lung disease
- ? Chronic heart disease
- ? Chronic kidney disease
- ? Chronic liver disease
- ? Chronic neurological disease
- ? Immuno-suppression (whether caused by disease or treatment)
- ? Diabetes mellitus
- ? Patients who have had drug treatment for their asthma within the past three years
- ? Pregnant women
- ? People aged 65 years and older
- ? Young children under 5 years old.

Advice for pregnant women

The Department of Health has issued updated guidance for pregnant women (available at www.dh.gov.uk/en/PublicHealth/Flu/Swineflu/DH_103068)

At present, mothers-to-be are not being advised to curtail normal activities such as going to work, travelling on public transport, attending events and family gatherings.

The practical steps to take to reduce the risk of infection and complications are again emphasised and include:

- ? observe good hand hygiene (frequent use of soap and water or sanitizer);
- ? wherever possible, avoid contact with someone who is known or suspected to have swine 'flu;
- ? if they have 'flu-like symptoms, to make early contact with their General Practitioner who may advise treatment with antiviral drugs.

- ? There is no need for other family members (e.g. partners, children) to take special precautions but they should practice good personal hygiene

At Phase 6, when the pandemic virus is ubiquitous, pregnant women are just as likely to be exposed to influenza in the community as their workplace.

The key advice is for pregnant women to avoid, as far as practicable, close contact with people who have symptoms of flu and to make early contact with their General Practitioner if they have “flu-like” symptoms as mentioned above.

Remember: Most pregnant women who catch the diseases are likely to make an uncomplicated recovery.

Travellers

There are no travel restrictions to any country. However some countries have started to screen arriving passengers and those with influenza-like symptoms (fever plus two or more symptoms of cough, sore throat, runny nose, body aches or headache) may be isolated, tested for flu or hospitalized and treated. If someone on your flight is ill or found to have pandemic flu, you may be quarantined for a period of time.

Before you travel:

- ? Delay travel if you are ill with a respiratory illness.
- ? Check the Foreign and Commonwealth Office web page for advice and to see if health screening is being carried out at your destination. (www.fco.gov.uk/en/travelling-and-living-overseas/swine-flu)
- ? Ensure you have comprehensive travel health insurance that includes coverage for trip cancellation and any potential disruptions to your trip such as quarantine.
- ? Useful and up-to-date travel advice and information is available at NaTHNac (National Travel Health Network and Centre) at: www.nathnac.org/pro/swineflu.htm

Basic Precautions

- ? Pay attention to scrupulous personal basic hygiene:
 - o Cover your nose and mouth when sneezing or coughing. Do not use your hand. Use a tissue, handkerchief or even your sleeve rather than your hand.
 - o Dispose of used tissues as soon as possible in the nearest waste receptacle.
 - o Wash hands frequently for at least 20 – 30 seconds using soap and warm water. Wash hands at the following times:

- ✍ Before, during and after food preparation
 - ✍ Prior to eating
 - ✍ After using the toilet
 - ✍ After touching animals or animal waste (if unavoidable)
 - ✍ After sneezing or coughing
 - ✍ After touching the nose or mouth
 - ✍ After changing nappies
 - ✍ Whenever hands are dirty
- ? In common areas, try to sit at least 1 metre away from coughing individuals
- ? Increase office cleaning frequency and include all hard surfaces: door knobs/keyboards/mice/telephones

Contact your CMO for further advice and information if required on 0870 060 5400