



Swine Influenza

Media Release

27 April 2009

Note: There will be a tele-conference with Otago and Southland Medical Officer of Health Dr Derek Bell at 4pm. Please dial 083033 then the pin number 844 594.

The Otago and Southland District Health Boards are setting up their Incident Response Centres to manage the Code Yellow Alert around the swine flu outbreak in Mexico and the United States.

At this stage, Public Health South staff have talked with four people in Otago and a family of five in Southland who were on flight NZ 1 which arrived in New Zealand on Anzac Day, but none of them has symptoms of influenza.

They are all in voluntary quarantine in their homes, Medical Officer of Health for Otago and Southland Dr Marion Poore confirmed today.

"This means those people stay at home and do not have visitors, to limit the potential spread of infection."

Public Health South is asking people who have returned from Mexico or North America on Flight NZ 1 on Saturday April 25 to contact Public Health South.

People who were on that flight and had influenza-like symptoms should contact their medical centre by telephone to discuss their concerns rather than just arriving at medical centres or hospitals, Dr Poore said.

People who arrived on other flights are not considered to be at increased risk.

While we realise this is an unsettling time for people because of talk about a pandemic (world-wide outbreak), the health sector and other agencies have been planning for this situation for some time.

It is important the public is aware of what is happening.

The single most important thing we can do to protect ourselves is regular and effective hand washing. When coughing or sneezing also, cover your mouth and nose with a tissue. Afterwards, promptly dispose of the tissue and wash your hands.

Keep your hands away from your mouth, nose, ears and eyes (mucous membranes that can let the virus in to your body through your airways or eyes).

Symptoms of the flu include:

- Sudden onset of illness
- Fever above 38 degrees Celsius
- Fatigue
- Muscle pains
- Runny nose/cough/sore throat

In some cases, people also have vomiting and diarrhoea.

The vaccination for seasonal influenza will not protect people against swine influenza.

ENDS.

For further information refer to the following websites:

Ministry of Health: www.moh.govt.nz

New Zealand Customs Service: www.customs.govt.nz

Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade: www.safetravel.govt.nz

World Health Organisation: www.who.int

New Zealand Food Safety Authority: www.nzfsa.govt.nz

For further local information and interviews, please contact:
Communications officer Gail Goodger 027 567 8281

Questions and Answers

What is the difference between influenza and a common cold?

Influenza:

- Fever above 38 degrees Celsius, lasting 3-4 days
- Severe headache
- Muscle aches and pains
- Fatigue and weakness, initially severe. Fatigue can last for weeks following the acute illness
- Children under five can experience nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea
- Sore throat
- Severe chest discomfort
- Can cause respiratory failure, can worsen existing medical conditions, and can be fatal

What is Influenza?

Influenza (the flu) is a highly infectious illness caused by a virus. It is much more serious than a common cold and will leave you ill for up to 10 days.

It may take up to three days to feel symptoms after you catch influenza (the incubation period). Symptoms include:

- a high fever
- headache
- muscle aches and pains
- fatigue
- cough
- sore throat.

Influenza can be a mild or severe illness depending on the type of influenza virus causing it, and the age and general health of the person affected.

Anyone can get influenza — being fit, active and healthy does not protect you from getting this virus.

Anyone can die from influenza — it kills at least 100 New Zealanders every year, including some young, fit people.

Seasonal Influenza

What is seasonal influenza?

Every year New Zealand experiences outbreaks of influenza, which peak during the

cooler months. They can be caused by a number of different strains of the influenza virus, but overall this is referred to as seasonal influenza.

What can you do to prevent getting or spreading seasonal influenza?

Every year, ask your doctor to vaccinate you against seasonal influenza. Because the influenza virus changes frequently, you need to get vaccinated every year.

Vaccination is free for people aged 65 years and over, and adults and children with certain long-term (chronic) conditions. Your GP will know if you are eligible for a free vaccination.

Influenza is very easily spread through coughs and sneezes. If you have influenza, avoid public places and close contact with other people. Always cough and sneeze into a disposable tissue. Put the tissue in a rubbish bin and wash your hands well afterwards.

Common cold:

- Watering of the eyes
- Runny, stuffy nose
- Sneezing
- Sore throat
- Mild chest discomfort
- Congestion or ear ache
- Mild fatigue

What is an influenza pandemic?

An influenza pandemic occurs when a new strain of influenza virus emerges, spreading around the world and infecting many people in a very short time.

An influenza virus capable of causing a pandemic is one that people have no natural immunity to and can easily spread from person to person. It may cause severe disease. An influenza pandemic could cause many deaths and could occur at any time. It could happen at any time of the year, not just winter.

What are the symptoms of pandemic influenza?

The symptoms of pandemic influenza are the same as seasonal influenza.

This includes: sudden start of a high fever, headache, muscle aches and pains, fatigue, cough or a sore throat.

The virus can cause a mild or severe illness depending on the type of influenza virus and the age and general health of the person affected. It may take up to three days to show symptoms.

How likely is an influenza pandemic?

It is certain an influenza pandemic will happen one day.

There are many avian influenza viruses circulating in some countries at present. One of these, such as the H5N1 virus, could become a pandemic influenza virus at any time if it changes so it can be easily spread from human to human.

How often do pandemics occur and what causes them?

Throughout recorded history there have been, on average, three pandemics a century. However, there is no regular pattern. Last century there were three influenza pandemics; in 1918, 1956-57 and 1968. All three pandemics last century were caused by different types of avian influenza viruses.

What could happen in an influenza pandemic

Who will decide if the world is having a pandemic?

The World Health Organization (WHO) will determine when a virus such as the avian influenza virus is spreading from human to human in sufficient numbers to constitute a pandemic.

Many governments and the WHO have intensive surveillance programmes to track the spread of avian influenza. These programmes will provide global early warning of human infections so governments can begin implementing "pandemic alert" phases designed to track the progress of the disease spread nationally.

[For more information, see the WHO website](http://www.who.int) (www.who.int)

Who will be in charge if there is a pandemic in New Zealand?

The New Zealand Government will ensure there is an appropriate response from all agencies involved. The Ministry of Health will take the lead in a national health emergency.

Will New Zealand stop travellers from coming into the country in an effort to stop the spread of disease?

Because we are an island nation, active management of the border (i.e. limiting arrivals from affected areas to allow us to impose effective on-arrival measures) needs to be considered among the range of options as we plan our response. Other countries are also considering border management options.

Any final decision on border management will be made by the Government with input from a range of government departments.

The details of how New Zealand might manage its borders are laid out in the [National Health Emergency Plan: New Zealand Influenza Pandemic Action Plan 2006](#).

How will I know what to do in a pandemic?

There would be public announcements on TV, the radio and through other media channels, and regular updates using a variety of communications channels.