

Novel Influenza A (H1N1) 09

Media Update #18

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Cases of Novel Influenza A H1N1 09 (Swine Flu) have now been detected in communities across Otago and Southland.

Medical Officer of Health Dr Derek Bell said there are a total of 11 confirmed cases from Dunedin, Invercargill, Alexandra, Oamaru and Wanaka. He said that it can be expected that there are unrecognised cases elsewhere across the two regions.

Dr Bell said some schools were also starting to report high absenteeism rates. "With the start of the school holidays tomorrow and the associated movement of people and families around New Zealand, we can expect to see greater impact of influenza at the start of school term 3."

Dr Bell reiterated the key message for minimising the spread of influenza. "If people are sick they should stay at home. Other family members and close contacts can continue with their regular activities unless they are also unwell."

At this stage general practices are continuing to manage the workload; however this is being monitored closely to inform the decision on whether Community Based Assessment Centres need to be activated across Otago and Southland.

The best way of limiting the spread of both seasonal influenza and Swine Flu include:

- Staying home if you are sick
- Using tissues to cover coughs and sneezes, and disposing of used tissues in plastic bags
- Washing hands scrupulously using soap and water or hand sanitizer
- Staying at least 1 metre away from other people in social situations
- Minimising social contact such as shaking hands, hugging etc

Most people will recover at home without the need for medical treatment. Those suffering from influenza should stay at home until they are totally free of symptoms including sneezing and coughing. Your GP remains your first point of contact if you become sick and need to seek help.

Phone the national toll-free Healthline (0800 611 116) or your healthcare provider for health advice.

People should not hesitate to seek medical advice if they are at higher risk of developing complications or if they become more seriously ill. People who appear to be at higher risk of more severe illness include pregnant women, young children and people with significant health conditions such as chronic heart disease, chronic respiratory conditions (including severe asthma), or reduced immunity.

Things to watch out for are:

- if you've been unwell for three or four days and are not getting any better or are feeling worse
- a high temperature (above 38.3C) that is not responding to attempts to reduce it
- difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- pain or pressure in the chest or stomach
- if you cough up bloody or green phlegm
- blue skin around the lips and/or blue skin on fingertips
- severe pain in the ear(s)
- severe vomiting
- difficulty waking up or feeling disoriented or confused
- fits or uncontrolled shaking
- if you started to feel better but then get a high fever and start to feel unwell again
- inability to keep fluids down
- other signs of becoming more sick such as children becoming more irritable and not eating and drinking.

For the latest information on Swine Flu, visit www.moh.govt.nz

For information on preparing for emergencies, including managing extended periods at home, see www.getthru.govt.nz

ENDS

For more information contact Jo Harvey, SDHB Communications Officer on 03 21 47243 or 027 674 1758.