

We are monitoring the global situation closely. Since our last update, there have been more deaths in the United States and Mexico and the number of confirmed cases in Japan has increased from 159 to 294 cases. However, Mexico City has lowered its swine flu alert level from yellow to green last night. The city's mayor, Marcelo Ebrard, has claimed that that the risk of contagion in the city is now low, and that there have not been any new infections in the city for a week. Rules have been relaxed in Japan where it is feared that the strict regulations put in place since the outbreak could harm the economy and put needless restrictions on the public.

Nevertheless, the epidemic continues to rise, especially in the United States, Canada and Japan. The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) reported in its update yesterday (21 May 2009, 17:00 hours CEST) a 32% increase in confirmed cases reported by Japan in the previous 24 hours. In the same update the ECDC reported that Canada had reported an additional 223 cases in the previous 24 hours, resulting in a 44% increase in confirmed cases. (However, the ECDC also reported that the newly confirmed cases in Canada represent cases reported during the period 16 to 20 May as Canada is currently reporting updated cases numbers only three times a week.) The 21 May edition of the ECDC situation report also highlights the fact that several articles have appeared in the United States media stressing the challenges of responding to the outbreak in a balanced way, particularly after a series of well-publicised school closures in New York.

The expectation was that the outbreak would decline in countries in the northern hemisphere as the summer approached. There is, however, no sign of the epidemic falling off just yet.

THE SITUATION IN THE UK

In the UK we are in a relatively stable 'containment phase' and it appears that policies have been successful in terms of minimising the level of human-to-human transmission of A (H1N1) flu. It is, however, still not clear how the virus will develop, and it has been suggested by Atlanta-based doctors writing in the Lancet Infectious Diseases journal that a community based strain of 'superbug' MRSA known as Community Acquired MRSA or USA300 could seriously aggravate the problems of a flu pandemic.

ESSENTIAL DOCUMENTS FOR GPs

GPs should continue to consult the HPA (www.hpa.org.uk) and RCGP (www.rcgp.org.uk) websites regularly to check for any updates or new guidance. In addition to the RCGP-BMA document, Preparing for pandemic influenza: Guidance for GP practices (http://www.rcgp.org.uk/PDF/GP_Guidance.pdf), GPs should be familiar with the following documents:

- Standard practical advice for investigating individuals with possible swine influenza (http://www.hpa.org.uk/web/HPAwebFile/HPAweb_C/1241048770758)
- WHO Pandemic Alert Phase 5: Algorithm for the management of suspected cases of swine influenza (http://www.hpa.org.uk/web/HPAwebFile/HPAweb_C/1240732819361)

- WHO Pandemic Alert Phase 5: Actions and post exposure prophylaxis for close contacts of probable or confirmed human cases of swine influenza

(http://www.hpa.org.uk/web/HPAwebFile/HPAweb_C/1240986160584)

There are also a number of useful documents accessible in the Information for Healthcare Professionals section of the HPA website (<http://www.hpa.org.uk/web/HPAweb&Page&HPAwebAutoListName/Page/1240812234677>) including:

- Recommendations on the use of antiviral medicines for pregnant women, women who are breastfeeding and children under the age of one year

http://www.hpa.org.uk/web/HPAwebFile/HPAweb_C/1242371196158

- The use of personal protective equipments (PPE) by healthcare workers in close contact with possible, probable and confirmed cases of swine flu during the pre and pandemic phases

http://www.hpa.org.uk/web/HPAwebFile/HPAweb_C/1242371195903

- HPA interim advice on the lifespan of facemasks and respirators

http://www.hpa.org.uk/webc/HPAwebFile/HPAweb_C/1242371195983

- Guidance on packaging samples for suspected A/H1N1 ("swine flu") (Category B): guidance for healthcare professionals

http://www.hpa.org.uk/web/HPAwebFile/HPAweb_C/1242371171250

IMMUNITY

It would appear that the A (H1N1) virus is tending to affect younger age groups. According to the Mexican health authorities, nearly 80% of those who have died in Mexico were between 20 and 54. New test results from the US Centres of Disease Control show that people in their 60s and older have signs of greater immunity to the new swine flu virus. It is thought that older people have greater immunity because they have been exposed to other viruses that are more similar to A (H1N1) flu than more recent seasonal flu. The Mexican health authorities have reported that many of those who died in Mexico are those who have suffered from underlying medical conditions. Almost 30% were reported to have been obese or have had other metabolic problems, and 13% were reported to have had cardiovascular problems.

SCRIPT FOR RECEPTIONISTS

The HPA are finalising a script for receptionists for use when contacted by persons with suspected A (H1N1) flu symptoms. We hope provide a link to this in our next update.

A (H1N1) FLU UPDATES:

- ECDC has reported (as of 08:00 CEST, 22 May 2009) that in the past 24 hours there have been 26 new confirmed cases were reported in the EU and EFTA countries, reaching a total of 316 confirmed cases reported from 17 countries (a 9% increase from yesterday's update).

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dwide.

- The World Health Organisation has reported (as of 06:00 GMT, 22 May 2009) that 42 countries have officially reported 11,168 cases of Influenza A (H1N1) infection. There have so far been 86 deaths: 75 in Mexico, 9 in the United States, 1 in Canada and 1 in Costa Rica.

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have reported (as of 11:00AM ET, 22 May 2009) a total of 6,552 confirmed and probable cases in 48 states in the US. There have so far been 9 deaths in the United States.

- According to the Health Protection Agency, there are now 117 confirmed cases in the UK and 169 cases currently under laboratory investigation. Five new cases have been confirmed in the UK today - two adults from London and two from the South East and one child from the West Midlands region. There are two cases of returning travellers, one is linked to a previously confirmed case and in the two other cases the source of infection remains under investigation.

- There have been no confirmed cases in Wales.

- Advice remains that individuals returning from affected areas who become unwell within seven days of their return or contacts of a confirmed or probable case of swine flu who are exhibiting symptoms should stay at home and contact their GP or NHS Direct on 0845 4647. Individuals will be assessed and, if necessary, testing and treatment will be provided.

INFORMATION RELATING SPECIFICALLY TO NORTHERN IRELAND, WALES AND SCOTLAND:

SCOTLAND:

There are now ten confirmed cases in Scotland in the following NHS Boards: Ayrshire and Arran (1); Forth Valley (3); Greater Glasgow and Clyde (6). There are 3 'probable' cases currently under investigation in Scotland - these are all travel related and in the Forth Valley NHS board area. The 3 'possible' cases are individuals in the Forth Valley, Grampian and Lothian NHS Board areas. All 'possible' cases are travel related.

NORTHERN IRELAND:

There is 1 confirmed case. 80 cases have been found to be negative and there are no cases currently under investigation.

WALES:

There are still 0 confirmed cases in Wales. 90 people have been under investigation in Wales. Of these, swine flu has been ruled out in 80 cases, leaving 10 still under investigation. All of these are displaying, or have displayed, mild symptoms. Of the 10 people under investigation, five were well when first identified, but reported recent flu-like symptoms following travel to Mexico.

The CMO for Wales, Dr Tony Jewell, issued letter to GPs on the 18th May 2009 in order to address issues which have been highlighted in Wales and require clarification. The letter stated the following:

- General practitioners, hospital staff and other health professionals are reminded of the need to contact their local National Public Health Service for Wales (NPHS) Health Protection Team if they have a possible case of Swine Influenza as the NPHS is leading the investigation and public health management of the first notifications of possible cases, including data collection. Details of how to contact the Health Protection Team in their particular area are on the NPHS website (www.nphs.wales.nhs.uk). A link to the latest information on Swine Influenza is provided on the home page. Guidance to health professionals can be found through the link at the top right of the home page.

- People returning from affected areas will continue to look to their GP for advice. Possible cases for investigation and management will be agreed between the GP and the NPHS Health Protection Team.

- The GP, in consultation with Health Protection Team, will advise on the use of antivirals. Currently, for close contacts, antivirals are only recommended if they have been in close contact with people determined as probable or confirmed cases of Swine Influenza H1N1.

USEFUL INFORMATION FOR GPs in ENGLAND, WALES, SCOTLAND AND NORTHERN IRELAND:

Preparing for Pandemic Influenza: guidance for GP practices
(http://www.rcgp.org.uk/PDF/GP_Guidance.pdf)

Pandemic Influenza - Preparation Checklist for Practices

(<http://www.rcgp.org.uk/Docs/Preparation%20Checklist%20for%20Practices.doc>)

The Lancet H1N1 Flu Resource Centre

<http://www.TheLancet.com/H1N1-flu>

International Journal of Clinical Skills

<http://www.ijocs.org/swineflu.aspx>

ENGLAND:

Local Health Protection Units:

<http://www.hpa.org.uk/webw/HPAweb&Page&HPAwebAutoListName/Page/1158945066055?p=1158945066055>

WALES:

National Public Health Service for Wales:

[http://](#)

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NHS Wales: <http://www.wales.nhs.uk/>

Investigation kits are available at out-of-hours centres across Wales and through local Health Protection teams. Kits are to be used only after discussion with local Communicable Disease Control Centres (CCDC) / Out-of-hours Public Health Service

Between 9:00am and 5:00pm call:

- South East (including Gwent) 029 20402478
- South West (including Dyfed Powys) 01792 607387
- North Wales 01352 803234

After 5:00pm ring and ask for an on call consultant in communicable disease control:

- South East (inc Gwent) 01633 293272 (
- South west (inc Dyfed Powys) 01267 222555
- North Wales 01248 689123

SCOTLAND:

NHS 24 Swine Flu Information:
http://www.nhs24.com/content/default.asp?page=s3_12

Health Protection Scotland:
<http://www.hps.scot.nhs.uk/resp/swineinfluenza.aspx>

The Scottish Government - Health and Community Care:
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Health/health/AvianInfluenza/mexicanswiur>

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Health Protection Scotland (www.hps.scot.nhs.uk)

NORTHERN IRELAND:

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:
<http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/>

SOURCES OF INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS:

England:

NHS Direct: 0845 4647 / www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

Wales:

NHS Direct Wales: 0845 4647 / <http://www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk>

Scotland:

NHS 24: 08454 242424 / www.nhs24.com

Northern Ireland:

Swine Flu helpline: 0800 0514 142 /
<http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/index/health-and-well-being/swine-flu.htm>