



[Issue 3](#)

[8pm, April 30 2009](#)

Current situation

The World Health Organisation last night raised the level of pandemic alert to five. This means that a 'flu epidemic is now considered imminent.

There are now eight cases in the UK, including one in the Torbay area. No further cases in Torbay have been confirmed. There remain no confirmed cases in the Devon PCT area. The distinction between care trust areas is important for administrative reasons – and clarity.

Preparations continue. The PCT is working to the pandemic 'flu plan. The coordinating group continues to meet daily.

A swine flu information line for the public has now been launched: 0800 1 513 513. This contains recorded information and will be useful to point members of the public to it.

There are now two patient algorithms – one for travellers and visitors to affected countries and another for patients who have been in close contact with probable or confirmed human cases. There is also practical advice for investigating individuals with possible swine flu infection. Click here for these:

<http://www.hpa.org.uk/web/HPAweb&HPAwebStandard/Page/1240732817665>

Main message remains:

CATCH IT: Germs spread easily, always carry tissues and use them to catch your cough or sneeze.

BIN IT: Germs can live for several hours on tissues. Dispose of them as soon as possible.

KILL IT: Hands can transfer germs to any surface you touch. Clean your hands as soon as you can.

Enquiries from the public:

If you receive an enquiry from a member of the public:

1. In the first instance, we would advise patients and the public to go online and visit NHS Choices for information and FAQs – www.nhs.uk. This content is continually refreshed with updates from national organisations including NHS Direct and the HPA and forms the most consistent and up to date knowledge and information on swine flu available online. There is also an online symptom checker on both www.nhs.uk and the NHS Direct website www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk where people, who are concerned that they've been affected by swine flu, can work through their symptoms and get information and advice.

2. Also, for those who require further information about swine flu, and in particular those who do not have internet access, should contact the National Swine Flu Information Line – 0800 1 513 513. This telephone line provides pre-recorded information and advice.
3. An alternative for patients and the public is to access NHS Direct's telephone service on 0845 4647. Callers will receive a welcome message which advises them what to do if they are calling about Swine Flu. Calls will be answered by trained health advisors. Where appropriate, callers will be transferred to nurse advisors who will use a specially developed algorithm to assess their condition and advise the most appropriate course of action.
4. The fourth line of enquiry for patients and the public is to contact their GP over the phone. Encouraging people to try other sources of advice and information first will hopefully help protect GP's time so that it can be channelled where it is most needed.

Important information for GP practices and clinical staff

There is no pandemic at this stage and there should be no general release of antivirals. Current indications are that this is milder than seasonal flu for which antivirals are not routinely issued. It is essential that GPs act as responsible "gatekeepers" and that antivirals are only issued where clinically appropriate as defined by the patient algorithms. These are changing frequently so make sure you are using the current version by following this link:

<http://www.hpa.org.uk/web/HPAweb&HPAwebStandard/Page/1240732817665>

Please remember that patients with suspected swine 'flu should be notified to the Health Protection Unit on **01803 861 833** (Mon-Fri 9-5). At weekends or overnight please call any acute hospital in our patch and request to speak to the on-call public health professional.

STOP PRESS: NEW CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER GUIDANCE

Issued at 19:55 on 30 April: The Chief Medical Officer has released new guidance to inform GPs and other health professionals of the steps they need to take to deal with enquiries about potential cases of swine flu. The basic actions should follow those that are already in place for dealing with a potential pandemic.

A copy of the guidance is included at the end of this update.

Advice to patients

The advice remains the same. If NHS staff are contacted by patients with flu-like symptoms or concerned members of the public the advice is that they should contact their GP or NHS Direct by phone stating any travel history to affected areas. Patients should not attend hospital unless their clinical condition is likely to require admission.

If swine 'flu is suspected in a patient they must be isolated with respiratory precautions and any further assessment continued once those precautions are in place. The algorithm is changing frequently as new information becomes available, so please make sure you are using the current version by following this link:

<http://www.hpa.org.uk/web/HPAweb&HPAwebStandard/Page/1240732817665>

Please remember that patients with suspected swine 'flu should be notified to: the Health Protection Unit on **01803 861 833** (Mon-Fri 9-5). At weekends or overnight please call any acute hospital in our patch and request to speak to the on-call public health professional.

Antivirals

Antivirals will be distributed to the trust as per pandemic flu plan – at WHO level 6. We are currently awaiting clarification regarding antivirals for GPs and staff.

GP communications

This update is sent daily to practice managers. The contents should be evaluated by a member of the practice management team and clinical staff to ensure key messages are shared with the right staff groups.

The update is the only official route for information from the PCT.

We understand how busy you are but we continue to receive a great deal of calls from GPs who have not read the swine flu update. This is putting additional pressure on an already very busy PCT swine flu team.

Please read the swine flu information first. If there are additional questions please email Elaine.leggett@nhs.net . Frequently asked questions will then be answered in the next update.

All practice managers were sent log on details to InfoPoint at launch in January 2008. However, if you anyone is experiencing problems accessing the site please email howard.chapman@nhs.net

Personal protective equipment (PPE)

We are currently awaiting clarification regarding the use of national PPE stocks.

PCT staff – your role

It is extremely important to check what your role would be should the situation become a pandemic. The PCT's pandemic 'flu plan has been placed on InfoPoint.

All NHS staff should familiarise themselves the plan and also take 10-minutes to read the self-training programme here: http://www.infopoint.devonpct.nhs.uk/your-sites/Directorates/Human_Resources/Pandemic_Flu.asp

Workload prioritisation

If you or a colleague are requested to participate in 'flu planning activities please do your best to accommodate the request. The situation is moving rapidly and we need to ensure our response continues to quick and effective

Communications

The trust is operating a 24/7 on call communications service during the current outbreak.

In office hours call 01392 267648/267646

Out of office hours call 07969 152 217

Press

Press interest continues to be high. Media are being targeted with key messages which are “we are well prepared” and “Catch it, bin it, kill it”.

Dr Virginia Pearson, director of public health at the trust, has carried out a live BBC Radio Devon interview. Reassurance messages have been given to people in Exeter and the local area via Express and Echo. Torbay PCT representative appeared live on BBC Spotlight. Dr Pearson is expecting further BBC Radio Devon live interviews. A third general press release also issued. See the trust website for latest:

www.devonpct.nhs.uk

Website

We are establishing a pandemic flu area. New information will be added shortly. Information for the independent care home sector is also to be added

www.devonpct.nhs.uk

Door-to-door leaflets

The Government has announced that pandemic flu leaflets will be issued to every household in the UK from next week. A mass media campaign began today. The main message continues to be one of continued good personal hygiene.

The leaflet is already available on the NHS Choices website. A link is being added to the website:

http://www.nhs.uk/news/2009/04April/Documents/Swine%20Flu%20Leaflet_Web%20Version.pdf

Posters

The trust has ordered an additional 5,000 posters to be displayed in public places in Devon. These should be dispatched within 48-hours.

We have included e-versions of the posters in advance of this. Please print and post these throughout the trust. They will also be posted on the trust’s website for use by the public and other agencies.

Communications champions

We are beginning to get a few more volunteers. Thanks to those who have come forward. As well as appeals to staff through this update we will also be making direct appeals through local management structures.

We need three volunteers from each PCT hospital and office. Please put yourselves forward if you are mobile and have regular access to email. The role itself will entail pinning up notices and posters.

If you wish to volunteer please contact Imogen gray on imogen.gray@nhs.net. Don’t forget to include your mobile phone number.

Business continuity

Every department in the trust should now look at their business continuity plans in detail.

Further Information

There are several sources of verified and accurate information. Staff should rely on these for factual information – not the media.

1. Infopoint <http://www.infopoint.devonpct.nhs.uk/home/> for the trust pandemic 'flu plan – insert pandemic flu in the search box for details.
2. World Health Organisation information:
<http://www.who.int/csr/disease/swineflu/en/index.html>
3. Health Protection Agency updates and information
 - For patients
http://www.hpa.org.uk/webw/HPAweb&HPAwebStandard/HPAweb_C/1240732817824?p=1240732817665
 - For NHS staff:
http://www.hpa.org.uk/webw/HPAweb&HPAwebStandard/HPAweb_C/1240732818131?p=1240732817665
 - For GPs:
http://www.bma.org.uk/health_promotion_ethics/influenza/index.jsp

A full list of FAQs are also available here and are being updated daily:
<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Pandemic-flu/Pages/QA.aspx>.

Swine Flu: Public Question and Answers

The following questions are based on recurring enquiries from staff or GPs.

Q. Why is Swine Flu affecting humans?

Infection with swine influenza virus has been detected occasionally in humans since the 1950s and human disease is usually clinically similar to disease caused by infections with human influenza viruses.

Cases of swine influenza in humans usually occur after a history of exposure to pigs, i.e. direct or close contact with infected pigs. Person-to-person transmission, like cases currently under investigation in the US and Mexico, has been previously reported but appears to be rare.

Q. Will swine flu lead to a pandemic?

There are confirmed reports of human cases of swine flu worldwide, including the UK.

The World Health Organisation has raised their alert level to Phase 4. Phase 4 means that there has been verified human to human transmission of the virus.

However, although the NHS is being vigilant and is well prepared, it is too early to predict whether swine flu could ultimately result in a global pandemic and Phase 4 reflects that position.

Q. How prepared are we in Devon?

The UK was one of the first countries to have a flu pandemic contingency plan in place.

The UK plan seeks to reduce the negative health impact of any pandemic and the possible disruption it may cause to essential services and people's daily lives. This will be through measures such as antiviral treatment and immunisation (when this becomes available), and preparing the NHS and society as far as possible.

The NHS in Devon has taken a proactive approach, developing plans to provide an effective response locally to an influenza pandemic - reducing the impact on health, safeguarding essential services and minimising social disruption.

We are working closely with NHS South West and the Health Protection Agency to ensure we act on the latest information and with local partner organisations to ensure effective co-ordination

Q. What is the advice to people in Devon?

The NHS is advising people to adopt good hygiene practice as normal:

- Cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing, using a tissue whenever possible
- Dispose of dirty tissues promptly and carefully – bag and bin them
- Maintain good hygiene – washing hands frequently with soap and water
- Clean hard surfaces (e.g. kitchen worktops, door handles) frequently, using a normal cleaning product
- Stay at home when you are sick – if you have a cough and a fever, it is best to rest at home, take medicines to relieve the symptoms and drink plenty of fluids. This will speed your recovery and help prevent the spread of infection. If you need medical advice or assistance, phone NHS Direct on 0845 4647 or your GP surgery.

Q. What is the latest travel advice?

The Foreign Office is advising against all but essential travel to Mexico.

The Foreign Office have also said that British nationals resident in or visiting Mexico may wish to consider whether they should remain in Mexico at this time.

A special website <http://urgent.internationalsos.com> has the latest information and travel advice. This website will be continuously updated.

Q. Can swine flu be treated?

It is possible to treat human swine flu cases as the virus is sensitive to available antiviral drugs.

Antiviral drugs (such as Tamiflu) reduce the length of symptoms and usually their severity. Testing has shown that the human swine influenza H1N1 can be treated with these antivirals.

Q. What is the advice to people who have recently travelled to areas affected by swine flu (e.g. Mexico and the USA) and have developed flu like symptoms after returning home?

Anyone who has symptoms of influenza that have developed within 7 days of visiting an affected area should stay at home (to limit contact with others), and seek medical advice by contacting NHS Direct on **0845 46 47**.

The clinical symptoms of swine flu are similar to human seasonal flu and include fever (of 38 degrees or more) and flu like illness (2 or more of the following symptoms – cough, runny nose, limb/joint pain, headache).

The Health Protection Agency has produced guidance for healthcare professionals in the management of returning travellers and visitors from countries affected by swine fluA/H1N1 presenting with respiratory illness: recognition, investigation and initial management. This is available on the HPA website -

<http://www.hpa.org.uk/web/HPAweb&HPAwebStandard/Page/1240732817665>

Q. How will people suspected of having swine flu be treated?

As a precautionary measure some of those who are symptomatic may be referred for testing for a range of respiratory and other illnesses, in line with UK health guidance.

They will have a swab test taken (throat and nose) and this will be sent for testing. Treatment will be given if appropriate and this could include being given Tamiflu. Close contacts (e.g. family members) of anyone confirmed as having swine flu could also be treated with Tamiflu after assessment.

Q. Has the NHS in Devon got good access to antiviral drug treatments?

The UK has antiviral stockpiles for the population that will be distributed to areas as needed.

Antivirals will be given to people if they become ill and require treatment. There are currently some local supplies and supplies will be increased if needed.

Q. Is Devon PCT supplying personal protective equipment (PPE) to the public?

There is no evidence of benefit to the general public for issuing personal protection equipment. The public should follow the advice given to 'Catch It, Bin it, Kill it' and maintain good personal hygiene. This has proven effectiveness.

Q. Will Devon PCT supply personal protective equipment to GPs and other frontline healthworkers?

The supply of personal protective equipment is the responsibility of each employer and will be issued in accordance with their employers arrangements.

Q. What information is being sent to GPs?

The swine flu update is the official PCT news source to GPs and NHS staff. The briefings are distributed to all locations and it is the responsibility of managers to ensure their staff can access them. In locations where there is limited access, the use of communications champions to print off and pin up information may assist managers with this responsibility.

Q. Are district nurses expected to visit potential symptomatic patients at home to take swabs on behalf of GPs?

Swabbing of patients is done with guidance from the Health Protection Unit. Swabbing of patients should not be necessary when if a pandemic is declared.

Q. Are there any specific briefings or issues about services for children including education etc?

Guidance for schools has been issued by the Department for Education and Skills. Follow the link here: <http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/doc/13523/FullGuidance.pdf>

From: cas.alerts@dh.gsi.gov.uk [cas.alerts@dh.gsi.gov.uk]
Sent: 30 April 2009 19:55
To: Pearson Virginia (DEVON PCT)
Subject: Central Alerting System: Swine Flu Alert

CASMSG0000000276312

Cascade codes: #GP#, #ACCIDENTEMERGENCY#, #COMMUNITYPHARMACISTS#
Category: Class 1: Immediate
Issue date: 30-Apr-2009
Reference: CEM/CMO/2009/11
From: Sir Liam Donaldson - Chief Medical Officer - Department of Health

Action by recipients:

- CMO Urgent Messages - Recipients on Public Health Link
- NHS Foundation Trusts (England) - Medical Director
- Primary Care Trusts (England) - Director of Public Health
- NHS Trusts (England) - Medical Director
- Primary Care Trusts (England) - Medical Director
- Regional Directors of Public Health
- Strategic Health Authorities (England) - Director of Public Health

For information to:

- NHS Foundation Trusts (England) - Chief Executive
- Primary Care Trusts (England) - PEC Chairman
- Primary Care Trusts (England) - Chief Executive
- Consultant! s in Communicable Diseases
- Strategic Health Authorities (England) - Chief Executive
- NHS Trusts (England) - Chief Executive
- Territorial CMOs in Ireland, Scotland & Wales

Title: Swine Flu Alert

Problem:

PLEASE CACADE IMMEDIATELY TO:

All GENERAL PRACTITIONERS

- please ensure this message is seen by all practice nurses working in your practice
- Deputising services
- Project manager/Nurse lead in Walk in Centres
- Lead nurses in PCTs
- Flu Co-ordinators
- Consultants in Communicable Disease
- PCT Pharmaceutical Advisers to forward to community pharmacists and hospital pharmacists
- Accident & Emergency Departments
- All relevant hospital doctors

30 April 2009

Dear Colleague

Swine flu alert

The purpose of this alert is to inform GPs and other health professionals of the steps they need to take to deal with enquiries about potential cases of swine flu. The basic actions should follow those that are already in place for dealing with a potential pandemic. Further guidance will be provided as and when circumstances change.

This alert will cover:

- the World Health Organisation (WHO) alert levels
- the details as known of the virus to date
- who should be offered antivirals at the moment
- what is suggested in a number of different clinical scenarios

Information is also provided on our current stockpile of antivirals, the plans for its distribution and access to it.

Background

Late last night, WHO declared Pandemic Alert Level 5. This means that a pandemic is considered imminent. More information about these Alert Levels can be found at the end of this message.

The virus

Swine influenza is a respiratory disease normally found in pigs but human cases can and do happen. No human cases have been detected in the UK in the last 10 years. The virus detected in this outbreak is an H1N1 strain of influenza type A that has not been previously seen in pigs or humans and contains a mixture of human, pig and avian flu genetic material. H1N1 is the same strain that causes seasonal outbreaks of flu in humans. The viruses are sensitive to antivirals which are available to effectively prevent and treat the infection. Transmission of this new swine influenza virus is thought to occur in the same way as seasonal flu.

Access to antivirals

At this stage, antiviral medication, Tamiflu (Oseltamivir) or Relenza (Zanamivir) is only indicated for supply on the NHS, for individuals who are suspected to have influenza on clinical grounds **and** on travel or contact history. Seasonal influenza finished circulating in the UK several weeks ago.

Health protection units have supplies of antivirals that are to be used in the initial mitigation steps for individuals who comply with the details described in the Health Protection Agency (HPA) algorithm, which is attached to this alert and can be downloaded at: <http://www.hpa.org.uk/>

The current policy

The following are examples of clinical scenarios that should be dealt with as described:

A patient who has recently returned from a country with confirmed cases, e.g. Mexico and the US, contacts or consults you

- Returned longer than seven days ago and is well:

No further action needed

- Returned less than seven days ago and is well:

Advise the patient that if they develop flu-like symptoms to contact you again or phone NHS Direct on 0845 4647. There is also information on the HPA website

- Returned less than seven days ago and has flu-like symptoms:

Advise patient to stay at home.

Follow the HPA algorithm, i.e. contact your local health protection unit to ensure access to antivirals and obtain further advice

Patient comes to your surgery and is unwell with flu like symptoms (especially ahead of the normal `flu season?)

- Isolate them promptly.

Otherwise advice is as above following the guidance in the algorithm regarding infection control and reporting

Patient has been in contact with someone from a country with confirmed cases

- Advice is as above whether patient is well or unwell

Antiviral stockpile

The current UK stockpile contains sufficient antiviral medication to provide treatment courses for around 50% of the population. This is one of the highest levels in the

world. The stockpile is being conserved for treatment, according to the HPA algorithm. Further supplies are being added to the stockpile.

Future antiviral distribution

As cases increase, systems will be put in place to distribute antivirals to a local level which will allow most patients to access treatment without needing to contact a doctor. GPs will not hold stock of antivirals on their premises. Planning assumptions and further guidance can be found at

www.dh.gov.uk/en/PublicHealth/Flu/PandemicFlu/index.htm

Please do not prescribe antivirals outside the terms of the current HPA algorithm, as retail pharmacies are unlikely to hold sufficient stocks. If antivirals are clinically indicated, then contact your local health protection unit to ensure access to antivirals. Please obtain details of your local health protection unit from <http://www.hpa.org.uk/>.

More information for patients

This is available at <http://www.nhs.uk/> and <http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk/>

Yours sincerely

SIR LIAM DONALDSON

CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER

APPENDIX 1

The WHO pandemic alert levels

Phases 1-3

Predominantly animal infections: few human infections.

Phase 1

New animal influenza virus circulating among animals is reported to cause infection in animals.

Phase 2

Animal influenza virus is known to have caused infection in humans and is therefore a potential pandemic threat.

Phase 3

Animal or human-animal influenza virus causes sporadic cases or clusters of cases in people, but no human-to-human transmission, except in specific circumstances.

Phase 4

Sustained human-to-human transmission.

Phase 4

Human-to-human transmission of an animal or human-animal influenza virus able to sustain community-level outbreaks.

‘The ability to cause sustained disease outbreaks in a community marks a significant upwards shift in the risk for a pandemic.’

Phases 5-6/Pandemic

Widespread human infection.

Phase 5

The same virus causes sustained community-level outbreaks in two or more countries in one region.

While most countries will not be affected at this stage, the declaration of phase 5 is a strong signal that a pandemic is imminent and that the time to finalise the organisation, communication, and implementation of the planned mitigation measures is short?.

Phase 6

The virus causes sustained community-level outbreaks in more than one region.

Post peak

Possibility of recurrent events

Pandemic levels dropping below peak levels, but countries need to be prepared for a second wave.

Post pandemic

Disease activity at seasonal levels.

- [S5 resp illness travellers SWINE H1N1 phase 5 2009 4 30 1000\[1\].pdf](#)
- [Swine Influenza Alert CMO 30 04 09.pdf](#)

Additional information:

You can view further details of this alert by clicking on the following link: [View Alert](#)

Please do not reply directly to this email as the mailbox is unmonitored, if you have any queries regarding CAS please contact the [CAS Helpdesk](#)