



THE GOVERNMENT OF NORFOLK ISLAND

MEDIA RELEASE

World Health Organisation declares Human Swine Influenza “an unstoppable pandemic”

The Norfolk Island Government Swine Influenza Task Force has met to consider the rapid global spread of Human Swine ‘Flu, now called Pandemic H1N1 by the World Health Organisation (WHO). WHO has declared that Swine ‘Flu is an “unstoppable pandemic” and has urged all nations to take measures to contain the disease and to work toward vaccinations within a few months to deal with a predicted second wave of infections.

The Task Force understands that to date, there have been no cases of the Swine ‘Flu identified in Norfolk Island. It has reviewed the protocols and procedures set in place to deal with any outbreak in the Island, and is taking steps to obtain vaccine when it becomes available later in the year. The Task Force has reiterated that everyone in the community should continue to take sensible health precautions, especially those in high risk groups including pregnant women, people with existing respiratory diseases or chronic conditions and the very old and very young.

What to do if you have flu-like symptoms

Everyone in the community is advised to remain alert to the symptoms of this type of influenza, which are similar to those of the regular ‘flu including fever, cough, sore throat, aching body, headache, chills, fatigue, diarrhoea and vomiting. Anyone experiencing these symptoms should contact the Norfolk Island Hospital **by telephone** on 22091 in the first instance for further advice. Appointments will be arranged for anyone requiring further assessment or treatment. After assessment by a medical officer, antiviral treatments will be provided on prescription only where required. People with flu-like symptoms, especially fever and aching limbs, are requested to telephone first and **not to go straight to the hospital** as this could spread the infection to other persons.

The Task Force strongly recommended that everyone in the community should continue to practice good personal hygiene measures to protect themselves from any form of influenza, including:

1. Cover your mouth and nose when you sneeze or cough

The ‘flu virus can travel through the air when a person coughs or sneezes. When you cough or sneeze you should:

- turn away from other people;
- cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve;
- use disposable tissues rather than a handkerchief (which could store the virus);
- put used tissues into the nearest bin, rather than a pocket or handbag; and
- wash your hands, or use an alcohol hand rub, as soon as possible afterwards.

2. *Wash your hands*

Washing your hands regularly - even when they aren't visibly dirty - with soap and water, or with an alcohol-based product that does not require water, is effective in killing the 'flu virus. A variety of alcohol-based gels, rinses or foams are available at local supermarkets and pharmacies. Always wash your hands:

- after you've been to the toilet;
- after coughing, sneezing or blowing your nose;
- after being in contact with someone who has a cold or 'flu;
- before touching your eyes, nose or mouth; and
- before preparing food and eating.

3. *Don't share personal items*

The 'flu virus can spread when someone touches an object which has the virus on it and then touches his or her eyes, nose or mouth. If a person in your household has the 'flu:

- keep personal items, such as towels, bedding and toothbrushes separate; and
- do not share eating and drinking utensils, food or drinks.

4. *Clean surfaces*

Influenza viruses can live on surfaces for several hours. If someone in your house has the 'flu, regularly clean surfaces such as tables, benches, fridge doors and doorknobs with soap and water or detergent.

5. *Avoid close contact with others if you are unwell with 'flu*

Keeping your distance by standing or sitting back at least one metre from other people will help reduce the chances of spreading the 'flu virus.

Pregnant women, people with respiratory illness and others in risk groups

People in certain risk categories should take particular care if they have flu-like symptoms, and should seek early advice from the Norfolk Island Hospital. This includes in particular pregnant women and people with respiratory illness. People with other chronic conditions are also encouraged to seek medical assistance when symptoms are first experienced.

Authorities in Australia have stated that most **pregnant women** in general will not get sick but they should be vigilant because Swine 'Flu is much more virulent than the normal flu. For this reason, they advised that as much as possible, pregnant women should avoid contact with others and seek immediate medical help if they suffer flu-like symptoms.

The Australian Chief Medical Officer, Jim Bishop, is urging anyone with flu-like symptoms who is also suffering **respiratory illness** to seek medical help. He said that health professionals had been asked to note that Swine 'Flu can affect previously well people although it will be a very small percentage of patients.

Future vaccinations

The Australian Government has announced that it has ordered 21 million doses of a swine flu vaccine, which is still being tested, and hopes to begin a nationwide swine flu vaccination program in October. The Swine 'Flu Task Force has requested His Honour the Administrator to contact Australian authorities seeking access to stocks of the vaccine for Norfolk Island. The Norfolk Island Hospital has also been advised by its supplier that they do not anticipate that there will be any problem for Norfolk Island obtaining supplies of the vaccine, when it has been cleared for sale and public use. The Task Force will keep the community informed about the availability of the vaccine and future procedures for inoculations.

Further information on the Human Swine 'Flu is available on the Australian Government's national influenza hotline on ph 08- 84028833 which Norfolk Island residents can call free of charge, with regular information updates and reports available from the national health emergency website at www.healthemergency.gov.au.

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