

## SWINE FLU Q & A BRIEF 1 May 2009

### Q. Are we facing a new influenza pandemic?

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has defined six phases of pandemic alertness. On 27 April they announced a move to Phase 4. Independent experts will continue to review the available evidence to determine any further developments.

### What are the World Health Organisation phases?

Phase	Description	Characteristics
1	Inter-pandemic Period	No new influenza virus subtypes detected in humans
2	Inter-pandemic Period	Animal influenza virus subtype poses substantial risk
3	Pandemic Alert Period	Human infection(s) with a new subtype, but no (or rare) person-to-person spread to a close contact
4	Pandemic Alert Period	Small cluster(s) with limited person-to-person transmission but spread is highly localised, suggesting that the virus is not well adapted to humans
5	Pandemic Alert Period	Large cluster(s) but person-to-person spread still localised, suggesting that the virus is becoming increasingly better adapted to humans
6	Pandemic Period	Increased and sustained transmission in general population
		<u>UK alert levels</u> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Virus/cases only outside the UK</li> <li>2. Virus isolated in the UK</li> <li>3. Outbreak(s) in the UK</li> <li>4. Widespread activity across UK</li> </ol>

## INFLUENZA VIRUS

### What is influenza?

Influenza is an acute infectious viral illness that spreads rapidly from person to person when in close contact.

### What are the symptoms of influenza?

Influenza is a respiratory illness with a wide range of symptoms characterised by rapid onset of illness, fever, cough, headache, sore throat, and aching muscles and joints.

The typical incubation period for non-pandemic influenza (the time between catching influenza and showing symptoms) is one to four days, with an average of two to three days.

People are most infectious soon after they develop symptoms though they can continue to shed virus, for example in coughs and sneezes, for typically up to five days (seven days in children).

### How does influenza spread?

Influenza is one of the most difficult infectious diseases to control because the virus spreads rapidly and easily from person to person. This is through two routes, *direct* and *indirect*.

- **Direct:** via droplets expelled from infected individuals (during talking, sneezing and coughing), which land on the mucous membranes where they enter the body and cause disease.
- **Indirect:** via hands touching contaminated surfaces or equipment and then touching the nose, mouth or eyes.

Studies suggest that influenza viruses may survive for some time on various surfaces, surviving longer on hard non-porous surfaces than on soft porous materials.

### How can I limit the spread of influenza?

Studies have shown that careful hand hygiene, commercially available alcohol-based hand disinfectant (i.e. alcohol hand gel) and domestic cleaning products can easily deactivate the virus.

The best way to protect yourself and others from the virus is to:

- stay at home if you are ill
- cover your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing, using a single use tissue
- disposing of dirty tissues promptly and carefully.
- maintaining good basic hygiene, for example washing hands frequently with soap and water to reduce the spread of the virus from your hands to face or to other people.
- Cleaning hard surfaces (e.g. door handles) frequently using a normal cleaning product.

- Making sure your children follow this advice.

**What should I do if I think I have influenza?**

Stay at home

Phone your GP or NHS24

Take over the counter remedies

## **SWINE INFLUENZA**

### **What is swine influenza?**

Swine influenza (swine flu) is an acute viral infection of the respiratory tract in pigs caused by type A influenza virus. The mortality rate is low in pigs and recovery usually occurs within 7-10 days. Swine origin influenza viruses also occur in wild birds, poultry, horses and humans, but interspecies transmission is considered a rare event. So far three influenza type A virus subtypes: H1N1, H1N2 and H3N2 have been found in pigs.

### **Can swine influenza infect humans?**

Yes. Human infections with swine flu have been detected occasionally since the late 1950s usually in persons with direct exposure to pigs (e.g. people working in pig farms, etc.). In Europe, since 1958 a total of 17 cases have been reported. In the US, an outbreak of swine influenza virus infections in humans was detected in recruits in a military camp in Fort Dix, New Jersey in 1976. A link to pigs was presumed but never discovered. Instead there was extensive human to human transmission, with over 200 infections resulting in 12 hospitalisations and one death

### **What are the symptoms of swine influenza in humans?**

Symptoms of swine influenza in humans are usually similar to regular human seasonal influenza symptoms, involving fever of sudden onset and respiratory symptoms, diarrhoea might also occur.

### **How do humans get infected?**

Most commonly, swine influenza is transmitted through direct contact or close proximity with pigs. Secondary cases following human to human transmission have been reported in the past but they are very rare. This virus is not transmitted from eating pork or pork products.

### **What is the risk of me getting human swine influenza?**

At present, the risk is very low due to the fact that there are very few confirmed cases in Scotland. Information is being gathered worldwide which will provide information on the level of infectivity of this new virus.

### **Can human swine influenza be treated?**

Most swine influenza viruses are susceptible to antiviral medications. The virus that was currently detected in people in the US and Mexico is susceptible to oseltamivir.

**Is there a vaccine against swine influenza?**

Yes, there is a vaccine available for pigs against swine influenza, but there is no vaccine to protect humans from swine flu.

**Is the seasonal influenza vaccine effective against swine influenza?**

There are certain similarities between the H1N1 human influenza viruses (covered by the seasonal vaccine) and the new H1N1 swine flu viruses so one can not rule out some cross-protection. However, investigations need to be undertaken to determine whether this is the case. Those investigations are under way, but will take quite some time.

**Where can I access further information about swine influenza?**

More information is available on the Health Protection Scotland website at:

[www.hps.scot.nhs.uk](http://www.hps.scot.nhs.uk)

## **PANDEMIC FLU PREPARATIONS**

### **What planning has been carried out for pandemic flu in Scotland? How advanced are these plans?**

WHO has said UK planning for a flu pandemic is among the most advanced in the world. The Scottish Government and NHS Scotland takes the threat of a flu pandemic very seriously and has been working with partner organisations for a number of years to ensure that Scotland is in the best possible position to respond to a pandemic.

The Scottish Government published the *Scottish Framework for Responding to an Influenza Pandemic* in November 2007. It is available on the Scottish Government web site at: [www.scotland.gov.uk/pandemicflu/scottishframework](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/pandemicflu/scottishframework) . It sets out the Scottish Government's strategic approach to dealing with an influenza pandemic and is relevant for all sectors. In addition, key organisations such as Health Boards have their own specific pandemic flu plans.

### **What surveillance arrangements are in place to track cases in Scotland?**

Surveillance arrangements are already in place, agreed with Health Protection Scotland. These would identify and describe cases and their contacts to inform appropriate public health and clinical action. They would also inform decision-making and planning at national level.

### **What is the process for the testing of cases?**

A great deal of work is going on to speed up the turnaround of suspected cases. Scientists have now developed a test to provide that can exclude a diagnosis of swine flu within five hours. Now that more is known about the virus and its characteristics, it will also now be possible to carry out these tests more quickly.

A swab can be taken from a patient in a healthcare setting or even in the home. It is then sent to a laboratory, where it undergoes a chemical test to identify which basic Influenza grouping it falls into. The intention is to test for the presence of Influenza A – which is one of a number of Influenza virus groupings to which swine flu belongs.

Once it is known whether the sample belongs to the Influenza A grouping - and combined with knowledge about the individual's movements (i.e. if they have travelled to one of the affected areas) and any symptoms - this can give an early indication that a patient may have swine flu, before in-depth genetic tests are carried out. It can also immediately rule out people whose sample is not from the Influenza A grouping.

In the interim between a positive identification of Influenza A but before detailed genetic tests are conducted, the patient can be administered with Tamiflu or another appropriate treatment before the results of the detailed genetic testing are available.

### **Who else is the Scottish Government working with?**

The Scottish Government and NHS Scotland is working closely with the UK Government and international bodies. Key to this is the World Health Organisation – the United Nations' specialised agency for health.

**How and when will plans be activated?**

The WHO has defined phases in the evolution of a pandemic that allow a stepwise escalation in planning, proportionate to risk. On 27 April, the WHO announced a change from phase 3 to phase 4. In Scotland, this means that all organisations will be reviewing their business/service continuity arrangements. On 19 April the WHO announced a move up from Phase 4 to Phase 5. This means that response plans must be ready for instant implementation for activation when required. Organisations are ready to respond to any further changes which WHO announces.

## **HEALTH PREPARATIONS**

### **How prepared is the NHS to deal with cases?**

All NHS Boards have local plans in place for their response to pandemic flu. Boards are already reviewing those plans and we will be working with them to ensure that the local response is in place to deal with any wider outbreak.

### **What will happen about normal NHS activity – out-patient clinics, planned surgery etc?**

At this stage our aim is to maintain normal levels of NHS activity, and primary care services, A&E services, planned surgery and out-patient clinics will continue as normal. Emergency plans exist for limiting routine activity, and will be implemented at a later stage if this becomes necessary, either because of a surge in flu cases requiring hospital treatment or if staff sickness affects the ability to deliver services effectively.

### **Will GP practices be able to cope in the event of a pandemic?**

As part of their planning Boards have already considered how they will deliver primary care services to their population during a pandemic.

In order to cope, GP practices will need to adapt flexibly to meet local surges in demand for their services. Primary care organisations are encouraged to adopt a multi-disciplinary approach to planning. Plans should aim to mobilize the available capacity and skills of all health staff and contractors to meet local demand.

### **The public are being asked to call their GP or NHS 24, how will NHS 24 cope with this demand?**

NHS 24 have been working closely with the Scottish Government and Health Protection Scotland and will continue to do so. They have set up a dedicated support service, accessed via the regular NHS 24 number (08454 24 24 24), and any members of the public who have concerns will be provided with appropriate advice. NHS 24 will carefully monitor call demand and will ensure they have appropriate staffing levels to support the service.

### **National Flu Line**

A swine flu information line has been set up – **0800 1 513 513**.

## **COMMUNICATIONS**

### **What plans do you have to communicate with the public?**

Leaflets will be available to the public by means of a nationwide door drop. These leaflets will articulate the main messages around swine flu and pandemic flu and what the public can do to protect themselves. We will also be running radio and television commercials and press adverts. All materials and adverts will contain details on where to go for further information.

## **COUNTERMEASURES**

### **Antibiotics**

#### **Do we have a stockpile of antibiotics ready for use?**

We announced plans to buy a stockpile of antibiotics for use in a pandemic and were in the process of placing orders when these problems with swine flu came to light. We will focus on maximising the use of antibiotics which are currently available as part of normal arrangements for the treatment of complications.

### **Antivirals**

#### **What are antivirals?**

Antiviral drugs are medicines for the treatment of certain viral infections. They have already been shown to be effective against the current H1N1 strain of swine influenza. Treatment with antiviral drugs can be expected to shorten the duration of the disease, alleviate symptoms and reduce complications and serious illness. To be effective, antivirals need to be taken within 48 hours of the onset of symptoms.

#### **What about stocks of antivirals?**

The Scottish Government has already procured a stockpile of antiviral drugs sufficient to treat the Scottish population at a clinical attack rate of 50%. This stockpile incorporates a mix of both oseltamivir (tamiflu) and zanamivir (relenza). All territorial NHS Boards have stocks of antivirals in place, and further supplies will be provided as required.

### **Masks**

#### **Should the public wear face masks?**

There is little evidence that facemasks will make any difference for healthy people in public places. Masks are only effective if they are of an appropriate type, worn correctly, changed frequently, removed properly and disposed of safely.

#### **Has the Scottish Government stockpiled facemasks?**

The Scottish Government has procured a stockpile of facemasks and respirators for frontline healthcare workers who are dealing with symptomatic patients. It is important to try and protect the sectors of society that need to support and care for those who will suffer from the virus.

#### **What about workers in other sectors?**

The Scottish Government has not procured masks for any other sectors. Wearing masks at all times is not practical; so decisions in occupational settings must take account of the degree of risk associated with particular occupations or activities and be based on joint risk assessments carried out by employers and staff representatives.

#### **What precautions should employers take for their staff?**

Arrangements for responding to Pandemic Flu should be part of all employers' Business Continuity, and guidance on specific health issues such as the risk of

transmission of swine fever is available from Health Protection Scotland (HPS) and will be routinely updated as further information becomes available.

Employers should plan and prepare based on this guidance by taking appropriate risk assessment measures.

**What is the impact on emergency services (Police, Fire and Ambulance)?**

Infection control (this provides advice on facemasks and Full Face Protection equipment) has been issued and agreed with the Emergency Services and Health protection Scotland.

Services should plan and prepare based on this guidance by taking appropriate risk assessment measures.

**Are emergency services at greater risk than the general public?**

This is a matter for services to consider themselves, however, we are advised that the risk of Emergency Services personnel contracting flu in the course of their duties, is similar by degree to individuals who carry – out their normal duties, or as a member of the general public. Indeed, there is no evidence to support a view that they are at a higher risk of contracting flu when responding to any type of emergency call.

In the vast majority of cases the Scottish Ambulance Service (SAS) will provide the health lead and supporting clinical judgement at a scene, and will deal with any symptomatic casualties. The SAS has appropriate protective equipment to deal with this type of event.

**Do the emergency services have access to current health stockpiles?**

No, these are for the higher priority needs of Healthcare workers dealing with symptomatic patients. This will be reviewed as the situation changes.

## **Vaccine**

### **Is there a vaccine for Swine influenza?**

There is currently no vaccine to protect humans from swine flu.

### **How long will it take to manufacture a specific vaccine once the strain has been identified?**

The vaccine will begin to become available 4 to 6 months after the strain has been recognised, and the total order will take several more months to complete.

### **What is the process for ordering a specific vaccine?**

The UK has finalised advanced supply contracts with manufacturers to make sufficient supplies of a matching vaccine available as soon as it is developed and is also working actively with the international community and pharmaceutical industry to speed development, testing and licensing.

### **Who are the priority groups for a specific vaccine?**

Any decisions on prioritisation would need to take into account the nature of the pandemic and independent expert advice.

## **TRAVELLING TO AND RETURNING FROM AFFECTED AREAS**

### **Why do the situations in the US and Mexico represent a new problem?**

The novel swine flu virus that has now been found in the two US states California and Texas and in Mexico contains pig, bird and human genes, in a combination that has never been observed before anywhere in the world. In addition there is a every indication that this virus has been transmitting from human to human and the resulting illnesses have been severe in a substantial number of cases in Mexico.

### **What is being done about the situation?**

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), the European Commission together with its Member States and the WHO Regional Office for Europe are monitoring and assessing the situation closely. The health authorities in Mexico are undertaking a number of measures for control and management of the outbreak such as closure of schools, advising avoidance of mass gatherings and distribution of antivirals. Furthermore, they have issued advice on hygienic measures to avoid the spread of flu. The US public health authorities have also issued advice on hygienic measures in the affected regions and have intensified the surveillance.

### **Is it safe to travel to Mexico or other affected countries?**

The Director General of the WHO has recommended that countries do not close their borders or restrict international travel. She added that it is considered prudent for people who are ill to delay international travel and for people developing symptoms following international travel to seek medical attention. Persons who intend to travel to Mexico and other affected countries are advised to consult the WHO website and website of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office for the latest advice. Currently, FCO is advising against all but essential travel to Mexico, whilst travelers to other affected countries should check for updates on the number of cases locally. Links to appropriate Government agencies in those countries are given on the FCO website. In addition, local media reports should be monitored for any developments. All travelers are advised to follow some general hygienic measures as listed below.

### **What can I do to protect myself if I want to travel to Mexico or other affected countries?**

If you are planning to travel to an affected area then the following recommendations should help you to reduce your risk of infection and help you to stay healthy.

Influenza is a disease that is spread through contact with respiratory secretions. To minimize contact with respiratory secretions you should ensure that you:

- wash your hands frequently with soap and water or use an alcohol based hand gel where soap and water is unavailable
- cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze and dispose of the tissue promptly
- ensure that you wash your hands after coughing or sneezing
- make sure your children follow this advice
- be aware of the health advice from local government at your destination as this will alert you to any changes in the situation during your travels

### **What should I do if I feel unwell during my visit to an affected area?**

If you feel unwell with fever and other influenza type symptoms such as generalized aches and pains, cough and sore throat you should seek medical attention as soon as possible. If you think you may be ill it is important to limit contact with other individuals to avoid spreading any illness. It is not currently recommended you carry antiviral medication with you when you travel.

#### 1.1.1 What should I do if I have returned from a country affected by swine influenza?

If you have recently visited one of the countries or areas where human cases of influenza have been identified, it is important for you to monitor your health closely for seven days.

If you feel ill with fever and other influenza type symptoms such as generalised aches and pains, cough and sore throat you should stay at home and telephone:

- your GP, or NHS 24 – 08454 242424
- inform them of:
  - your symptoms
  - your recent travel
  - If you have had contact with someone with influenza whilst visiting an affected country
- Avoid contact with other people whilst you feel ill
- Make contact with your employer in relation to guidance on your return to work
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze and dispose of tissue promptly
- Ensure that you wash your hands after coughing or sneezing
- Keep hard surfaces such as door handles and work surfaces clean using a normal cleaning solution

## **EDUCATION**

### **Q: Will Scottish schools close, as they have done in Mexico?**

A: It's far too early to say. Government, local authorities, schools, child care settings and others already have contingency plans already in place. If it should be judged appropriate by the Scottish Government - a decision that would be taken on medical and child welfare grounds - to recommend that schools and early years childcare settings should close, then the agreed contingency plans for effecting such closures would come into play.

### **Q: What about the forthcoming SQA exams (starting on 5th May)**

A: Scottish Government officials have been in touch with the Scottish Qualifications Authority. For the time being, from the SQA's and from schools' perspectives, it is business as usual. If the situation should change, the SQA, authorities and schools all have contingency plans that would come into play depending on the stage the exam process has reached – between the first candidates sitting exams a week on Tuesday right through to delivering the results in August and beyond.

## **THE ECONOMY**

### **Q: Could a potential flu pandemic exacerbate the economic downturn experienced in Scotland and elsewhere?**

A: The Scottish Government has in place an economic recovery programme to support Scottish households and businesses.

## **TRANSPORT AND TRAVEL**

### **Q: What is the advice regarding travelling abroad?**

A: Foreign and Commonwealth Office advice about the area you are travelling to should be followed.

<http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travelling-and-living-overseas/swine-flu>

### **Q: Will it be safe for members of the public to use the public transport network during a flu pandemic?**

A: Should a pandemic be declared by the World Health Organisation, people may continue to use public transport. However, it is important to abide by Health messages about personal hygiene practices and if feeling unwell to stay at home and not travel.

### **Q: Will the continued use of public transport help spread the virus?**

A: As the situation develops and the impact of the virus is assessed, appropriate information will be provided. It will be very important to comply with Health messages on personal hygiene measures.

**Q: Are transport operators prepared for a flu pandemic?**

A: Scottish Government continues to work with all public transport operators and associated bodies to ensure contingency plans take account of the latest thinking and advice. The importance of business continuity planning was highlighted to transport industry stakeholders at a seminar in August 2008 and at a subsequent pandemic flu workshop in January this year.

## **ENERGY**

**Q: Will power supplies be affected?**

A: Scotland's energy sector has robust contingency plans in place, covering a wide range of scenarios, to ensure that power supplies remain unaffected.

## **BUSINESS**

**Q: What support is Scottish Government offering the wider business community?**

A: Scottish Government is engaging closely with business organisations and will continue to keep them informed of developments for the duration of the outbreak. Our focus remains on ensuring our key sectors and indeed all businesses are fully prepared to deal with the impacts of any outbreak.

**Q: How can organisations prepare for managing staff absences and other HR issues, during a flu pandemic?**

A: Reviewing existing HR policies for an influenza pandemic is an important part of pre-pandemic planning. Additional protocols may be necessary for the employer to help staff understand the unique and serious implication of a pandemic. The guidance provides more detail on managing staff and absences, including practical measures managers and community care providers can take to mitigate the impact absenteeism has on services. It also contains information on occupational health and staff welfare issues.

The principle risk to the continuity of critical business functions in a pandemic is the **shortage of staff** internally, and in partner organisations and suppliers.

Businesses will need to ensure that they have:

- identified **critical functions** that must be maintained;
- identified the resources needed to deliver these, particularly **staff with specialist skills, knowledge or authority**;

- available information required by staff who might be required to deputise for others;
- arrangements in place to implement **changes in work priorities and reassign resources** in order to maintain critical services; and
- arrangements in place to maintain **effective communications** with staff, customers and suppliers.

Businesses should consider the effect of staff absences in suppliers and other businesses on which they depend.

Businesses should also review advice from NHS concerning infection control measures in the workplace. They should ensure that staff are aware of guidance about when they should and should not go to work if they may have or have had influenza.

## **TELECOMS**

**Q: Can I be sure that telecoms will not degrade as a result of a pandemic?**

A: We are not expecting telecoms systems to be disrupted as a consequence of a flu pandemic. Telecoms service providers have well developed business continuity plans in place to ensure that systems and networks are not disrupted. However, lead times for completing orders for additional/new installations, eg, broadband, may lengthen as people consider working from home in the event of a pandemic. If staff absences become critical then routine maintenance and repair may take longer to complete as staff are diverted to priority tasks.

## **PIG HEALTH AND PORK**

**Q: How do we know if there is Swine Influenza in pigs in Scotland?**

A: There are no reports of swine influenza in pigs in Scotland. The UK and some other members of the European Union undertake surveillance to help detect the presence of animal diseases and the results of that surveillance indicate that the new N. American H1N1 variant does not appear to be present in Europe.

**Q: Could imported pigs bring in this disease to Scotland?**

A: Strict import controls are in place to regulate the import of pigs into the EU and the UK. The Community has drawn up a list of third countries from which Member States may, under normal circumstances, import pigs. Member States can only import pigs from countries on the list. Mexico and the USA are not on the approved list for the import of live pigs. Pork and pig food products from Mexico are also prohibited, but permitted from the USA. People returning to the European Union from anywhere in the world are not allowed to bring back any meat or meat products, including pig meat.

**Q: Can people catch swine flu from eating pork?**

A: No. Advice from the Food Standards Agency is that eating properly handled and cooked pork and pork products is safe. Swine influenza viruses have not been shown to be transmissible to people through eating properly handled and prepared pork or other products derived from pigs. Cooking pork to an internal temperature of 160°F/70C kills the swine flu virus as it does other bacteria and viruses.

## **EMERGENCY SERVICES**

**Q: Do emergency services have contingency plans in place, should large numbers of staff be affected?**

A: All emergency services have well-planned contingency plans, which will work towards limiting any impact on services and ensure public safety is maintained.

Strategic Co-ordinating Groups, which include the Emergency Services, are currently meeting around the country to monitor the current situation and prepare for the possible implementation of these plans.

The Minister for Community Safety is meeting Fire Board Conveners this week, on which this is a key agenda item.

## **INWARD TOURISM**

**Q: Should foreign visitors postpone their plans to travel to Scotland?**

A: Foreign visitors should refer to travel guidance issued by their country's own Government. For foreign visitors already in Scotland, there are currently no internal travel restrictions.

## **SOCIAL CARE**

**Q: What steps are local authorities taking in respect of Social Care?**

A: All local authorities have plans and arrangements which have already been agreed and set out as part of their contingency planning.

Strategic Coordinating Groups are currently meeting around the country to monitor the current situation and prepare for the possible implementation of their plans

## **PRISONS**

**Q: Is the SPS prepared for a flu pandemic?**

A: Robust preparations have been made, with a large range of medical resources in place to help combat any outbreak.

**Q: What happens if staff become ill and there is a major shortage?**

A: The response to this will be proportionate to the impact on staffing. However, any significant shortfalls could have an impact on our ability to service the Courts.

**Q: Will prisoners be more likely to fall ill?**

A: We don't yet know. However, given prisons exist as a closed heavily populated community, there is potential for more speedy contamination than in the general population.

## **MASS GATHERINGS / SPORTING EVENTS**

**Q: Should people avoid mass gatherings such as sporting events?**

A: The Scottish Government is currently unlikely to issue a blanket ban on large public gatherings. There is little direct evidence of benefits in cancelling such events.

**Scottish Resilience  
1 May 2009**

