

Swine Flu Update

Town and Parish Councils

30 April 2009

The World Health Organisation (WHO) announced today that we are at level 5 in terms of swine flu, which means there are large clusters of cases identified, but human-to-human spread of the virus remains localised.

As a result NHS Herefordshire and Herefordshire Council are working closely together in an enhanced state of preparedness, in case we move to level 6 (influenza pandemic). This is by no means a foregone conclusion, but we have to be prepared, working with the Health Protection Agency and Department of Health, to provide help and advice for local people.

Director of public health Dr Akeem Ali is Herefordshire's lead. He and his team are working with local clinicians and the public to ensure the necessary vigilance, access to advice and treatment and the reinforcement of public health messages about respiratory/hand hygiene.

In line with WHO measures, Herefordshire is working to the following priorities:

1. Protect citizens and visitors against health and wider consequences
2. Support national and international efforts to prevent and detect its emergence and prevent, slow or limit its spread
3. Organise and adapt the health and social care systems to provide treatment and support for people who may have influenza or its complications whilst maintaining other essential care
4. Support the continuity of essential services and protect critical infrastructure
5. Support the continuation of everyday activities as far as practical
6. Uphold the rule of law and the democratic process
7. Instil and maintain trust and confidence by ensuring that the public and the media are engaged and well informed in advance of and throughout the pandemic period
8. Promote a return to normality and the restoration of disrupted services at the earliest opportunity

Increased public information

The Department of Health has launched today a Swine Flu Information Line – 0800 1513513 which contains pre-recorded messages giving background to the disease and what we can all do to prevent its spread. It will refer callers who need more assistance to NHS Direct

A national door drop of information leaflets is expected to take place from next Tuesday. The leaflets will only be available in English. The West Midlands Strategic Health Authority is considering how best to make the information available in other languages and Herefordshire's corporate diversity team are also considering how we can address this.

If you want copies of those leaflets now, you can obtain downloads from www.direct.gov.uk/swineflu, *NHS Choices* www.nhs.uk, or the *Department of Health* website www.dh.gov.uk as from now.

To keep the public informed a mass public health campaign has started with TV and radio ads sent to all broadcasters. The adverts remind people of the measure they can take to contain the spread of swine flu.

Information for public can be found on: www.nhs.uk and www.hpa.org.uk - as well as on the council's website www.herefordshire.gov.uk and the primary care trust web site [Click Here](#)

Guidance for schools

Schools and other children's services are expected to be operating as usual at present and there is additional guidance published on planning for, and responding to, pandemic flu. This can be found on the Teachernet website: [Click Here](#).

WHO level is still not a pandemic and there have been very few confirmed cases in the UK. However there is now increased urgency for local authorities, schools and others to review their existing plans or to start planning now, drawing on the Department for Children Schools and Families.

Confirmed cases of swine flu

It is still the case today that the NHS has reported one confirmed case of swine flu in the West Midlands. A woman from Redditch, Worcestershire contracted swine flu after visiting Mexico. It is confirmed as "a mild case" and the patient is responding well to treatment at home and her immediate family and the people she had been in contact with were being monitored and there was "no need" for the wider population to worry.

In addition there is one confirmed case in London and one in Torbay, in addition to the two confirmed cases in Scotland, who are being treated in hospital.

NHS Herefordshire will not be giving a running commentary on any suspected cases of swine flu in the area but in the coming days and weeks we would expect that some members of the public would be contacting their GP or NHS Direct seeking advice. These numbers are likely to change regularly, so it would be very difficult to provide helpful information with any certainty. Some of those people may require further assessment and treatment, others will not. The Health Protection Agency (HPA) will be giving daily updates to the national media on the number of confirmed cases and number of cases under laboratory investigation - www.hpa.org.uk.

The NHS has been preparing for the possibility of a pandemic since 1998 and the UK is among the most prepared countries in the world. NHS Herefordshire, like all NHS organisations in the West Midlands, has a Pandemic Influenza Plan. The NHS has enough antivirals to treat half the population of the UK if they become ill.

The advice is, if you have come back from Mexico or one of the affected countries, and have flu like symptoms, stay at home and call your GP or NHS Direct on 0845 4647.

News will be communicated regularly, so watch out for more updates.

Simple steps you can take

There are simple steps that you and your family should take to help prevent catching colds and flu, based on good respiratory and hand hygiene.

- Cover your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing, using a tissue.
- Dispose of dirty tissues promptly and carefully.
- Maintain good basic hygiene - wash hands often with soap and water to reduce the spread of the virus from your hands to face or to other people.
- Clean hard surfaces (e.g. door handles) often using a normal cleaning product
- Make sure your children follow this advice.

Again, for more information about prevention please: [Click Here](#)

Swine influenza: Questions & Answers

(Updated Daily: Latest Information at the End)

What is swine influenza?

Swine Influenza is a respiratory disease of pigs caused by type A influenza viruses. Outbreaks of swine influenza happen regularly in pigs. People do not normally get swine influenza, but human infections can and do happen. Most commonly, human cases of swine influenza happen in people who are around pigs but it's possible for swine influenza viruses to spread from person to person also.

Recently, cases of human infection with swine influenza A (H1N1) viruses have been reported in Southern California and near San Antonio, Texas. In addition, isolation of the same virus from cases in an outbreak in Mexico has indicated more widespread human-to-human transmission.

Is this swine flu virus contagious?

It has been determined that this virus is contagious and is spreading from human to human. However, at this time, it not known how easily the virus spreads between people.

How common are cases of swine influenza?

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, as suspected in the cases currently under investigation in the US and Mexico, have been previously reported but appear to be rare.

What are the symptoms of swine influenza?

The symptoms of swine influenza in people are similar to the symptoms of regular human seasonal influenza infection and include fever, fatigue, lack of appetite, coughing and sore throat. Some people with swine flu have also reported vomiting and diarrhoea.

What is the difference between seasonal influenza, avian influenza, swine influenza and an influenza pandemic?

Influenza viruses are commonly circulating in the human and animal environment. Different strains can cause illness in humans, bird and pigs.

Seasonal influenza is caused by influenza viruses that are adapted to spread in humans (human influenza). Humans have some natural immunity to the strains that are in common circulation, and this immunity can be boosted by immunisation with a seasonal influenza vaccine.

Avian influenza is caused by influenza viruses adapted for infection in birds. Similarly, swine influenza is caused by influenza viruses adapted for infection in pigs.

These illnesses all elicit the same respiratory symptoms in their hosts. Sometimes, humans and animals can pass strains of influenza back and forth to one another, such as when humans become ill with avian or swine influenza, usually from direct contact with animals who are ill.

Mixing of human and animal influenza viruses can lead to the development of changed viruses with the ability to cause infection and spread in the human population. There may be little or no immunity in the human population to these new viruses.

An influenza pandemic is defined as a new or novel influenza virus that spreads easily between humans. When new influenza viruses are introduced into the environment, humans don't have any natural immunity to protect against them. Therefore, there is a risk that that new influenza viruses could develop into a pandemic if the virus passes easily from human-to-human.

Is this the next influenza pandemic?

It is too early to say whether the cases confirmed so far will lead to a larger outbreak or could represent the appearance of potential pandemic strain of influenza virus.

There is currently insufficient evidence to understand the extent to which cases in Mexico and the US are firmly linked or to make a complete assessment of the health implications of this new virus.

The Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO) is the decision maker in terms of declaring an influenza pandemic and elevating the global stages of pandemic alert. Experts from around the world are working in close collaboration with WHO to help determine what risk this situation poses to global public health.

Is treatment available?

Testing has shown that the human swine influenza H1N1 is sensitive to and can be treated with the antivirals oseltamavir (Tamiflu) and zanamivir (Relenza).

If someone who has been to the affected areas of Mexico and/or the U.S is feeling sick what should they do?

Returning travellers from affected areas are being told to contact their GP or NHS Direct seeking health advice in the coming days and weeks. 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.

Normal seasonal flu is still circulating in other countries and we expect to see around 5 to 10 per cent of returning travellers, from anywhere in the world at any time, suffering from respiratory illness.

Who has anti-viral medication in Herefordshire and where do we get it from?

Hospital and community pharmacies supply a wide range of medication to patients but only when prescribed by clinical staff. We are not currently in a pandemic. Should the UK enter a pandemic there will be supplies of Tamiflu to treat 50 per cent of the population. At this stage the public will be advised on how to access anti-viral medication.

Some community and hospital pharmacists have very small stocks of Tamiflu, which have been used to treat seasonal flu cases. Patients must not go to hospital or community pharmacists for supplies of Tamiflu.