

Pandemic Planning Factsheet #1:

January 2007

Pandemic Influenza – an overview

Pandemics occur when a novel strain of the influenza virus develops, against which most people have no immunity. Pandemics are characterized by international spread and high death tolls, and have occurred roughly three times a century since the 1500s. The World Health Organisation has warned that the spread of HN51 Avian Flu has laid preconditions for a pandemic in the near future.

New Zealand has been planning for some time. The Ministry of Health has a national pandemic plan, and District Health Boards have local plans.

In Auckland, PHOs have been involved in a test of their communication systems, in preparation for an emergency. So far though, planning has not been extended to the front line of primary care, where plans need to be most robust.

ProCare has recruited Hoagy Scoins as a Pandemic Planning Co-ordinator. Hoagy will be working with practices in Counties Manukau in early 2007 to plan for a pandemic. Hoagy has several years' experience of project work with the NHS, mainly in the field of Workforce Development.

A great deal of good work has already been done. Community Based Assessment Centres, which will come into operation in a pandemic, have been identified; and practice plans are already nearing completion at practices identified by CMDHB as having strategic significance.

Planning - some simple rules

Good infection control will be the difference between those practices that are overwhelmed, and those where staff are able to keep working in the crisis. It's easy to get bogged down in planning the details, when the crucial thing in an emergency is to keep it simple. Use the four rules below as the basis of your plan, and you will be heading in the right direction. Your plan should facilitate these rules for patients and staff:

Hand hygiene

Regular hand washing, particularly after any hand-to-face contact, is the single most important thing that can be done to prevent the spread of infection.

Cough and sneeze etiquette

Always use tissues, dispose of them safely and wash and dry your hands afterwards.

Social distance

Keep at least 1 metre away from those who may be infected, and avoid public gatherings.

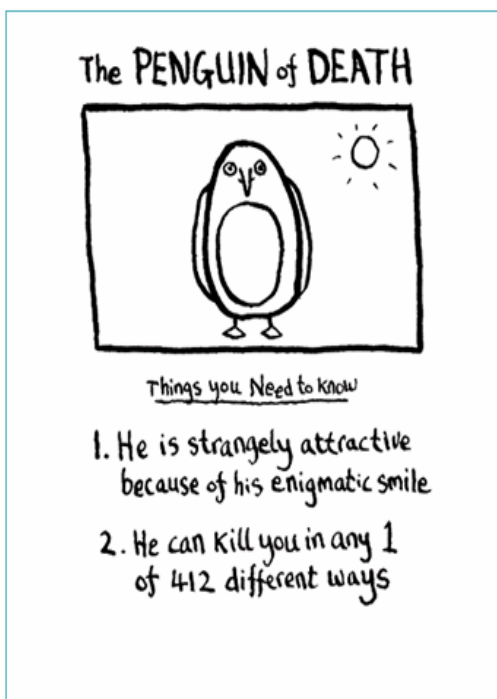
Personal Protective Equipment

PPE should be stockpiled for the use of practitioners whose work will make it impossible to always maintain social distance.

Also remember that the influenza virus can spread in poorly-ventilated spaces.

Don't assume Tamiflu is the answer – it is only effective if administered within 48 hours, and its effectiveness on a pandemic virus is untested.

Please contact Hoagy with any questions.



Contact: Hoagy Scoins, Pandemic Planning Coordinator.

Phone: 021 497 917

E-mail: hoagy.scoins@procare.co.nz