

ATTN: All primary health care staff!

Infection control for primary health care

- **Potential pandemic influenza**

There is widespread worldwide concern that a current outbreak of Avian Flu caused by the H5N1 virus may mutate to allow human to human infections. Travellers may carry this to New Zealand.

The Ministry of Health is currently operating within the WHO Code White (or information) phase and the College – as lead agency for the General Practice Leaders' Forum – is working with the Ministry and the College of Practice Nurses (NZNO) to ensure primary health care gets quick and accurate information.

The Ministry continues to work on resources for you as part of their over-arching plan, and is currently receiving individual plans from all DHBs. The Ministry is checking these plans to ensure there has been appropriate consultation with primary health care.

We have been assured that if that consultation is not apparent in the plan, the DHB will be asked to re-consult. It is important you know there will be a local plan for your area, and at this point practices need to begin planning to dovetail into the regional plans for what will be a community-based response.

We are still in the planning phase, so make sure you establish and test communication links with the appropriate people at your DHB who will hold and distribute supplies. And with the local Medical Officer of Health who must be involved immediately you suspect a case of avian flu.

Initial precautions

Such a major health event can only be handled by the whole general practice or Accident & Medical team and we would recommend you involve your team in any planning and preparation. Do not forget the cleaner. Consider setting the expectation of an initial warning telephone call from a patient, with receptionist or practice nurse triage.

Initial precautions for dealing with a suspected pandemic flu sufferer are basic for primary health care staff

- **Keep your distance**
One metre is accepted as safe
- **Wear mask and gloves**
Offer mask to any patient and support person accompanying them
- **Frequent hand washing**
Wash in hot water with soap where possible, or use an alcohol-based rub where running water is not available.
- **Ventilation**
Fresh air movement is ideal, so open windows where you can, especially in your waiting areas.

Each general practice or A & M should promote hand washing, the use of tissues when sneezing, or sneezing into the elbow to patients, remembering that when the virus dries, it is dead.

Other areas to plan for include the appropriate handling of patient care equipment and soiled linen, environment cleaning and spills management and the appropriate handling of waste.

Influenza patients should:

- Be isolated if a room is available. If single rooms are not available, suspected cases may be grouped together in one area. The room should desirably have hand-washing facilities
- Be encouraged to wear a surgical mask that should be replaced when damp
- Be asked to cough/sneeze into a tissue and to dispose of the tissue afterwards, then wash hands in hot water with soap or use an alcohol-based rub if running water is not available.

Health care workers

Health care workers in direct contact (and anyone entering patient room or handling patient specimens or equipment) should

- Be sufficiently educated about influenza transmission risks
- Use appropriate protective equipment – a surgical mask is generally acceptable and should also be offered to the patient and any support
- Treat all waste as infectious waste
- Monitor their own health twice daily for signs of fever and respiratory symptoms
- Consider the use of anti-viral medication.

Essential supplies

Practices should ensure adequate supplies are available on site

- Gloves
- Masks – surgical masks are generally acceptable
- Tissues – for both waiting and consulting rooms
- Waste disposal bins – with lids for infection control
- Hand washing material

For further information:

Website: <http://www.moh.govt.nz/pandemic>

Numbers: Healthline 0800 611 116
0800 immune

Useful sites: World Health Organisation, <http://www.who.int>
Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (USA)
<http://www.cdc.gov>
Australian government website
<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/wcms/publishing.nsf/Content/p-hd-pandemic-prepared-protected.htm>

CME initiatives

The College has agreed in principle to endorse any future Ministry educational events about pandemic planning, therefore they attract 2 credits per hour. There will also be a mechanism for claiming up to 5