

## NHS Grampian

### Influenza A (H1N1)

#### Question and answer sheet for staff of partner organisations – 22 June 2009

General information on influenza A (H1N1) (previously known as swine flu) has been made available in a number of ways since the end of April. This has been background information, provided in electronic or paper format, with links to a number of websites. However a number of staff of partner organisations – Local Authorities, Grampian Police and Grampian Fire and Rescue Service have requested more detailed information in the form of a question and answer sheet, particularly given the increasing number of cases of influenza A (H1N1) in Scotland. This sheet therefore answers a number of the key national and local questions that have been raised. Details of how to get more information or paper copies of this question and answer sheet are given on the last page.

#### **What are World Health Organisation phases?**

The World Health Organisation has defined six phases of pandemic alertness. Previously the WHO was at Phase 5. Phase 5 is when there is sustained human-to-human spread being seen in at least two countries in one world region e.g. the Americas. The WHO has now announced a move to Phase 6. Phase 6 occurs when there is sustained human-to-human spread in at least one further country in another WHO region e.g. Australia. It does not mean that the virus is becoming more serious.

Phase 6 also means that countries need to be ready to implement pandemic plans immediately. The move to Phase 6 will not trigger any material change in the response from NHS Grampian at this time, given the level of planning and hard work that has been undertaken across all agencies to date.

#### **What is influenza A (H1N1)?**

Flu is a viral infection. Influenza A (H1N1) refers to the current influenza virus, which contains some elements of a virus found in pigs, which has adapted to spread in humans.

In the past, most human cases of swine influenza have been in people who were in close contact with pigs, such as farmers. This is why it was called swine flu, although it can also affect wild birds, poultry and horses.

Influenza A (H1N1) is different from normal influenza, or “flu”, because it is a new type of virus that few, if any, people have resistance to and that spreads easily between humans.

## **What are the symptoms of influenza A (H1N1)?**

The symptoms of influenza A (H1N1) in people are similar to the symptoms of human seasonal influenza infection. They include;

- Fever
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny nose
- Sneezing
- Aching muscles
- Limb/joint pain
- Headache

Some patients have also experienced vomiting and diarrhoea.

## **Can influenza A (H1N1) be treated?**

One of the ways to lessen the symptoms is to treat infected people with antiviral medicines such as Tamiflu or Relenza. We have sufficient stocks of antivirals available in Grampian and can arrange for people to obtain these should they be prescribed.

Additional supplies have been stockpiled by the Scottish Government. Antivirals can:

- Reduce the length of time you are ill
- Relieve some of the symptoms
- Reduce the potential for serious complications

They are not a cure, but they lessen the symptoms and help recovery. You should not take antivirals unless they have been prescribed for you.

## **Is there vaccine against swine flu?**

There is not currently a vaccine against swine flu, but one is being developed and should be available by the autumn. One key piece of work underway at present is the consideration of how a mass vaccination programme could be introduced across Grampian and whether this would be in addition to the normal seasonal flu vaccination. It is likely that health and social staff will be one of the priority groups for swine flu vaccination.

## **What has been happening in Grampian?**

The Strategic Coordinating Group (SCG), which is chaired by the Chief Constable met for the first time to discuss swine flu on Sunday 26 April 2009. It was agreed that the chair would pass to the Chief Executive, NHS Grampian, given that influenza A (H1N1) was a health led issue. In NHS Grampian the pandemic influenza plan was activated when it became clear that cases of swine flu were being reported, initially in Mexico. Other organisations activated their own plans at the same time. Since then the Health Advisory Group (HAG) and the Pandemic Influenza Management Team (PIMT) – both health-led groups, with partner representation, have met at regular intervals. Initially these groups met every day, but that has been adjusted so that they meet when there is work to do or

advice required. An enormous amount of work has been undertaken in many teams and departments across all agencies in Grampian and the effort of all staff involved has been greatly appreciated.

### **Which staff have been involved?**

The focus of the work has fallen very much to health staff, although staff of other agencies have been reviewing preparedness in their own organisations. The initial weeks involved a great deal of planning and preparation alongside responding to possible cases of influenza A (H1N1). The Health Protection Team, supported by the wider Public Health staff, have been involved in providing advice and guidance as well as following up potential cases of influenza A (H1N1). In the community GPs have been busy visiting potential cases of influenza A (H1N1) and ensuring they receive the correct investigation and treatment. In addition detailed planning has been undertaken in the health sectors to put operational arrangements in place to treat people who are ill, look at how we continue to provide our services in the event of staff illness and consider practical issues such as the distribution of antivirals. Many teams and individuals have played either led this work or and supported those who are leading it and re-prioritised other activity accordingly. Similar work has been taking place across all agencies and there have been regular joint discussions and joint planning – particularly between health, social work and education.

### **What is the current position in Grampian?**

The current position is that there are two confirmed cases of influenza A (H1N1) in Grampian, however this could change at any time. Given that the number of cases across Scotland has risen significantly in the last week it is likely that we will see further cases in Grampian in the near future.

### **How prepared is Grampian to deal with any cases?**

The SCG member agencies in Grampian have well developed pandemic flu plans. Currently, we are as well prepared as possible as a result of detailed planning and hard work from many people. The experience of colleagues elsewhere has provided opportunities to learn from them and to apply the learning to our local situation. However flu can behave in an unpredictable way and we will need to be ready to adapt and respond in the coming months.

### **What is the difference between possible, probable and confirmed cases?**

- A “possible case” is someone who has the symptoms of influenza A (H1N1) and has either been in contact with a confirmed case or travelled to an affected area.
- A “probable case” is someone who has gone through the first stage of testing and has tested positive for influenza A. Influenza A (H1N1) is a strain of influenza A and a further test is required to identify whether the person has that strain.
- A “confirmed case” is someone who has tested positive for influenza A (H1N1) on this further test.

**Will flu have an impact on normal NHS activity – emergency services, social gatherings, outpatient clinics, planned surgery etc**

This is one of the issues that the SCG considers every time it meets. At present there is no impact on normal activity and it is certainly the intention to maintain all normal levels of activity. However, if it became necessary to limit routine activity at a later stage, either because of a surge in flu cases or if staff sickness affects our ability to deliver services, decisions will be taken at that time. Given the likely impact across Scotland it may be that decisions of this type are national decisions taken by the Government.

### **Should staff wear face masks?**

The decision about whether you should wear a mask and the type of mask you should wear depends on whether you are treating patients with influenza A (H1N1) and the type of contact you have with these patients. Many staff will not require any face mask. Staff who are in contact with patients with possible, probable or confirmed influenza A (H1N1) should familiarise themselves with the information produced by Health Protection Scotland or discuss the use of face masks with their manager. Advice about the use of face masks can be sought from NHS Grampian's Infection Control Team.

Those caring for patients with possible, probable or confirmed influenza A (H1N1) should wear a surgical mask. Where staff are performing an aerosol generating procedure on these patients, or where the patient has a severe respiratory illness, correctly fitted masks called FFP3 masks are required. These staff will be mainly health care staff. Staff who need to wear these masks require face fit testing to ensure the mask fits properly. There are a range of sizes available in these masks. A rolling programme of measuring and fitting of face fit masks is underway with trained face fitters undertaking the fitting.

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

GP practices have been preparing to cope with a flu pandemic, along with every other part of the health service community in Grampian. Primary care services are the first point of contact for the vast majority of people and practice teams are planning how they will deal with local surges in demand for their services.

### **What advice is there about whether staff should come to work?**

- If you have flu-like symptoms and have come back from a country affected by influenza A (H1N1) or have been in an area of Scotland where there is evidence of influenza A (H1N1) – predominantly the south of Glasgow, Paisley or the Argyll and Bute area - principally Dunoon - you should stay at home and contact your GP or NHS24 on 08454 24 24 24.
- If you have flu-like symptoms and have been in contact with a probable or confirmed case of influenza A (H1N1), you should also stay at home and contact your GP or NHS24.
- If you have been in close contact with a probable or confirmed case of swine flu and do not have flu-like symptoms, you should seek advice from the health protection team about whether you should come to work or stay at home
- If you have more severe flu-like symptoms (whether or not potentially connected with influenza A (H1N1) causing you concern and you are worried about your health you should contact your GP or NHS24.

- If you have recently returned from an affected country and do not have flu-like symptoms you do not need to stay off work and you need take no further action.

Please ensure that you notify your line manager immediately if you find that you are not able to attend work.

### **What should staff do if their child's school or nursery is closed?**

We appreciate that the unplanned full or partial closure of a school or nursery is difficult for staff who face childcare issues.

If your child is asymptomatic you should attend work as normal.

If your child is a probable or confirmed case of swine flu and you have symptoms you should stay at home and contact your GP or NHS24. If your child is a confirmed or probable case and you are asymptomatic you should stay at home and seek advice. Your manager, HR department or occupational health service may need to seek guidance from NHS Grampian's health protection team about whether you should go to work or stay at home.

### **How can I protect myself from the virus?**

General infection control practices and good respiratory hand hygiene can help to reduce transmission of all viruses, including the influenza A (H1N1) virus. This includes:

- Covering your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing, using a tissue when possible
- 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

### **Where can I find more information?**

Recommended information is available on the following website pages:

<http://www.hps.scot.nhs.uk/resp/swineinfluenza.aspx>

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Health/health/AvianInfluenza/mexicanswiuneflu>

[http://www.nhs24.com/content/default.asp?page=home\\_swineflu](http://www.nhs24.com/content/default.asp?page=home_swineflu)

If you need specific information in relation to your job, your workplace or your organisation please raise these with your manager. Your manager will seek specialist advice from NHS Grampian if necessary.

**This question and answer sheet is also available in large print and on computer disk. Other formats and languages can be supplied on request.**

Please call NHS Grampian's Corporate Communications team on (01224) 554400 or e-mail: [grampian@nhs.net](mailto:grampian@nhs.net)