

IOE INFORMATION TO MEMBERS ON THE INFLUENZA A (H1N1) DEVELOPMENTS

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Keep informed of developments nationally

The situation is developing rapidly and is different from country to country. Employers should keep informed of the national developments and can play their part in cooperating with the authorities and providing information to their workforce. Some countries have provided public health advice regarding school closures, avoiding crowds and other social distancing measures. But check with your authorities so that you support current best practice and avoid overreaction.

The current advice still remains valid.

- ✓ Anyone who is ill should not come to work and if they become ill at work they should seek medical attention. They should not return until their condition has been diagnosed and treated.
- ✓ Support and reinforce the national communications campaigns and advise employees to follow good hygiene practices. These will help to slow the spread of the virus and will be the single most effective thing individuals can do to protect themselves and others from infection.

People should

- ✓ Always carry tissues.
- ✓ Use clean tissues to cover their mouths and noses when they cough and sneeze.
- ✓ Bin the tissues after one use.
- ✓ Wash hands with soap and hot water or a sanitiser gel often.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) headquartered here in Geneva currently advises **no restriction of regular travel or closure of borders**. 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, in line with guidance from national authorities. Travellers can protect themselves and others by following simple prevention practices that apply while travelling and in daily life

Guidance on protecting your employees and business from pandemic human influenza

ILO guidance

Following previous influenza outbreaks, an ILO project in Thailand developed an Action Manual for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises. It contains useful information that can be adapted to the current situation and it can be downloaded in pdf format from http://www.ilo.org/asia/whatwedo/publications/lang--en/docName--WCMS_101422/index.htm.

WHO guidance

WHO is coordinating the global response to influenza A (H1N1). Information on the website <http://www.who.int/csr/disease/swineflu/en/index.html> is tracking the evolving situation and provides access to both technical guidelines and information useful for the general public.

In health care settings the use of suitable masks could reduce the transmission of influenza, but in the community the benefits of wearing masks has not been established. Nonetheless, many individuals may wish to wear **masks** and they are a useful reminder of the need for good hygiene practices but are only effective if used with them.

Pork, pork products and trade

Pork and pork products, handled in accordance with good hygienic practices recommended by international bodies will not be a source of infection. The influenza A(H1N1) has not been shown to be transmissible to people through eating properly handled and prepared pork (pig meat) or other products derived from pigs. It is killed by cooking temperatures of 160°F/70°C, corresponding to general guidance for meat preparation. As for all meat products, meat from sick pigs or those found dead should not be processed or used for human consumption under any circumstances.

Initial emergency measures, in some countries, have led to reduced consumption of pork products, loss of consumer confidence in the industry and falls in pork commodity prices. This could lead to closure of businesses and layoffs for workers. It is important that the international community respect the latest official advice, based on careful scientific evaluation that trade restrictions and measures affecting pork and pork products consumption are unnecessary

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Further update will be provided if there are significant developments. For further information contact asherson@ioe-emp.org

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Rapidly changing situation

The situation continues to evolve rapidly -- as of 20 May 2009, 41 countries have officially reported 10,243 cases of influenza A(H1N1) infection, including 80 deaths compared with 30 April 2009 when 11 countries reported 257 cases and 8 deaths

Symptoms of swine flu

Some of the symptoms are the sudden onset of fever, cough or shortness of breath. Other symptoms can include headache, sore throat, tiredness, aching muscles, chills, sneezing, runny nose or loss of appetite. These symptoms can also occur for other reasons and should be checked by the medical authorities

A balanced approach

Because it's a new virus, no one will have immunity to it and everyone could be at risk of catching it.

Flu viruses are made up of tiny particles that can be spread through the droplets from sneezing or coughing. They can be transferred from hand to any hard surfaces that are touched and since they can live on those surfaces for some time they can be spread by contact.

Many countries have been stockpiling **antiviral drugs** for use in this situation. They are not a cure, but they help recovery if taken within 48 hours of symptoms developing, by:

- ✓ Relieving some of the symptoms.
- ✓ Reducing the length of time of illness by around one day.
- ✓ Reducing the potential for serious complications, such as pneumonia

Scientists are working on the development of **vaccines** but currently no vaccine is available to prevent this flu as each vaccine has to be specific to the virus and these are constantly mutating.

A cautious approach for future developments

FACTORS INFLUENCING SEVERITY OF AN INFLUENZA PANDEMIC

The major factor determining the severity of an influenza pandemic, is the inherent virulence of the virus. However, many other factors influence the impact of a pandemic.

Even a pandemic virus that initially causes mild symptoms in otherwise healthy people can be disruptive, especially under the conditions of today's highly mobile and closely interdependent societies. A virus that causes mild illness in one country can result in much higher morbidity and mortality in another. The inherent

virulence of the virus can also change over time as the pandemic goes through subsequent waves of national and international spread.

The contagiousness of the virus will influence the speed of spread, both within countries and internationally. This, too, can influence severity, as very rapid spread can undermine the capacity of governments and health services to cope.

People with underlying chronic conditions are more likely to experience severe or lethal infections. The prevalence of these conditions, combined with other factors such as nutritional status, can influence the severity of a pandemic in a significant way.

SUBSEQUENT WAVES OF SPREAD

The overall severity of a pandemic is influenced by the tendency of pandemics to encircle the globe in at least two, sometimes three, waves. For many reasons, the severity of subsequent waves can differ dramatically in some or even most countries.

A distinctive feature of influenza viruses is that mutations occur frequently and unpredictably and the emergence of an inherently more virulent virus during the course of a pandemic can never be ruled out.

Different patterns of spread can also influence the severity of subsequent waves. For example, if schoolchildren are mainly affected in the first wave, the elderly can bear the brunt of illness during the second wave, with higher mortality seen because of the greater vulnerability of elderly people.

WHO ASSESSMENT OF THE CURRENT SITUATION

The WHO has the following observations on the H1N1 virus, and the vulnerability of the world population, but it is based on limited data in only a few countries.

The current H1N1 virus strain is a new virus that has not been seen previously in either humans or animals. Scientists anticipate that pre-existing immunity to the virus will be low or non-existent, or largely confined to older population groups. H1N1 appears to be more contagious than seasonal influenza.

Scientists are concerned about possible changes that could take place as the virus spreads to the southern hemisphere and encounters currently circulating human viruses as the normal influenza season in that hemisphere begins. They are monitoring developments closely.
