

Glen Abbot Ltd.

Swine Flu Briefing 39 – 25/10/2009

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Current Situation:

Well as the time changes to winter the figures for the expect Clinical Attack Rate also change. The news from the UK Cabinet Office significantly alters the expected level of infection. As of this week the CAR (or CIR) has been reduced from 30% of the population to 12%.

This is clearly significant and has a major affect on calculations of absence.

Here are some quotes from the UK Government on this:

The additional information now available confirms earlier guidance that children under 16 are significantly more susceptible to the virus, and up to 30% may fall ill during this second wave. However, the worst-case clinical attack rate across the population as a whole has now been reduced from 30% to 12% between now and the end of the normal flu season. This means that in the peak week of the pandemic up to 1.5 million people may become ill and 5% of people could be absent from work.

There is no change to the advice about the duration of illness: around 75% of people who become ill will recover within ten days, and those with complications normally between ten and fourteen days.

However, we should not underestimate the threat that swine flu still poses. The numbers of people being admitted to hospital with flu at this time of year is worrying and in the last four weeks, admissions to critical care have quadrupled. Some of the deaths and severe illness are occurring among the young and previously healthy people. It is expected that over this pandemic wave, up to a further 35,000 people may need to be admitted to hospital, with up to 5,300 requiring critical care. These figures do not take into account the potential benefit of vaccination.

It is possible that the pandemic flu wave could then be followed by a subsequent outbreak of seasonal flu or other similar virus.

These revisions are welcome but are not a sign to relax. We are still likely to see substantial levels of sickness and the health and social care services are likely to come under considerable pressure.

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Does everyone say the same?

Well it is interesting that the US President Barack Obama has declared swine flu a national emergency. In a statement, the White House said the president signed the proclamation concerning the 2009 H1N1 outbreak on Friday. The purpose behind this is to allow federal agencies to have more leeway to act quickly.

The President included this as part of his statement:

"The rates of illness continue to rise rapidly within many communities across the nation, and the potential exists for the pandemic to overburden health care resources in some localities."

As of today the WHO had not commented on the UK's change

Vaccines....

Europe's drugs watchdog said on Friday that giving two doses of swine flu vaccine was preferable, even though many governments are pushing ahead with single-shot immunization for most people.

One dose of GlaxoSmithKline's Pandemrix and Novartis's Focetria may be sufficient in adults, but the data so far is not conclusive, the European Medicines Agency said.

After reviewing the latest findings, the agency's Committee for Medicinal Products for Human Use (CHMP) said it continued to recommend that H1N1 vaccines be preferably used as two doses, at least three weeks apart

The UK press has been giving the delivery of vaccines a hard time this weekend. For example the lead story in Scotland on Sunday has the following:

The Scottish Government's swine flu jab programme was condemned as "descending into chaos" yesterday, with vulnerable patients facing weeks of delays before they are vaccinated.....

A letter sent last week by Chief Medical Officer Harry Burns to doctors suggested it could be well into next month before GPs were told what supplies they could expect.'

Sir Liam Donaldson

Most weeks I quote from comments made by Sir Liam who is England's Chief Medical Officer and the main UK Government spokesperson on H1N1. Here is some of what he has had to say this week.

..... although the H1N1 virus had not mutated into a more severe form, doctors were very unnerved by the severity of illness and how life-and-death situations arose very early. The speed of development [of the disease] has been very rapid in some cases."

On the the rise in critical care rates, which have risen higher than at any point in the pandemic, Sir Liam said: *"We don't understand why this has happened. It looks as if the virus is having a different impact in the flu season than it had in the summer."*

So where are we now?

It does seem a little confusing. The Clinical Attack Rate has been reduced from 30% to 12% in the UK, yet in England the number of cases doubled this week from the previous week and the US Government declares a state of emergency. The H1N1 virus seems to be mild for most, yet most countries are concerned about their health services being able to cope and there is a worrying level of serious illness associated with the virus.

The only advice I can give is to not become complacent. While much about flu and pandemics is well research from previous outbreaks we can only ever use this as a guide. I will be looking more closely at all the numbers this week and once I have a better understanding of how more countries see things I will update you all.

Pregnancy

There is no question that H1N1 represents a potential risk to someone who is pregnant and much good advice is available from the Health Authorities in many countries.

For anyone who is pregnant or who may have staff who are pregnant I thought you might be interested in a BBC Radio programme from last week. Woman's Hour did a 5 minute interview with Professor Sir Hugh Pennington on the subject and you should be able to listen again here:

http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/womanshour/04/2009_42_mon.shtml

Past Briefings

All previous briefings are available at our website: www.glenabbot.co.uk

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Training and Consultancy

We provide specific pandemic training courses both publicly and bespoke to companies. If you are interested please contact me directly or email Geoff Howard at Continuity Shop (gHoward@continuityshop.com). We can also help organisation review or create plans so if you need any assistance please contact me via this email or Andrew Sinclair on Andrew.sinclair@glenabbot.co.uk. Our office number is 01738 580580.



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