

# Glen Abbot Ltd.

## Swine Flu Briefing 02 - 28/04/2009

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### World Health Organisation Raise Level to Phase 4

The WHO has moved their pandemic alert monitor to phase 4 which is defined as:

***Phase 4** is characterized by verified human-to-human transmission of an animal or human-animal influenza reassortant virus able to cause "community-level outbreaks." The ability to cause sustained disease outbreaks in a community marks a significant upwards shift in the risk for a pandemic. Any country that suspects or has verified such an event should urgently consult with WHO so that the situation can be jointly assessed and a decision made by the affected country if implementation of a rapid pandemic containment operation is warranted. Phase 4 indicates a significant increase in risk of a pandemic but does not necessarily mean that a pandemic is a forgone conclusion.*

A summary of the WHO statement is:

*The Emergency Committee, established in compliance with the International Health Regulations (2005), held its second meeting on 27 April 2009. The Committee considered available data on confirmed outbreaks of A/H1N1 swine influenza in the United States of America, Mexico, and Canada. The Committee also considered reports of possible spread to additional countries. On the advice of the Committee, the WHO Director-General has raised the level of influenza pandemic alert from the current phase 3 to phase 4.*

### Travel

The Foreign & Commonwealth Office are advising against all but essential travel to Mexico. No other travel restrictions have been suggested although the FCO do suggested checking before travel to areas of the USA which have infections identified.

### Flu Type

The H1N1 variant does not seem to be a severe strain in cases discovered outside Mexico. It is not clear at present why there have been a number of deaths in Mexico while those outside the country appear to have only very mild flu like symptoms.

## **PANDEMIC PREPAREDNESS: What should we be doing?**

The most important action everyone can take during a possible flu pandemic is to raise their level of personal hygiene.

Careful hand washing, cleaning of hard surfaces such as door handles, tables tops and toilets will all help to reduce the potential spread. No specialist cleaning materials are needed. The purchase and regular use of antiseptic hand gels may be of benefit.

### **Business Actions**

Many organisations trigger their pandemic plans when the WHO declare phase 4. The sensible initial actions are:

- Convene a meeting of your pandemic response team
- Review your pandemic plans to ensure it they are up to date
- HR departments should ensure they have current policies in place for the absences which may be expected
- Prepare communications for staff to give good advice on personal hygiene and counter any misinformation in the media
- Review and test the ability of staff to work from home.

### **About Influenza**

Influenza is a viral disease which lasts from three to ten days and can be followed by fatigue for two or three weeks thereafter. It usually causes aching muscles and joints, headaches, cough and fever with a temperature of between 38o and 40oC. Influenza is highly contagious and its presence among a workforce is likely to promote anxiety in co-workers especially in situations where personal space is limited and staff work in close proximity to each other.

It is essential that personnel learn to recognise symptoms possibly consistent with influenza and that they report these symptoms promptly.

### **Anti Virals**

The UK Government has sufficient stockpiles of Tamiflu and Relenza for 50% of the UK population. This should be more than adequate for any outbreak. H1N1 appears to respond well to treatment with these drugs.

## Masks

There is little need to consider the issue of masks other than that they may give some degree of security to the wearer.

Key points about masks are:

- They need to be replaced every 4 hours
- They must be disposed of carefully
- They are not practical to wear for long periods
- Only face fitted masks are of any benefit (sanding masks from B&Q are useless!)
- Government advice is not to issue masks

## What are the symptoms of common influenza?

- Headache
- Severe weakness and fatigue
- Fever (38°C to 40°C).
- Dry cough
- Aching muscles and joints.
- A runny nose and sore throat
- Chest pains
- Lack of appetite
- Restless sleep
- Chills and shivering
- Indigestion
- Vomiting or diarrhoea

## Treatment

- Drink as much as possible - you lose a lot of liquids during a fever
- Rest, preferably by staying in bed
- Try to get plenty of sleep
- If you have a cough, over-the-counter cough remedies may ease symptoms
- Avoid smoking and drinking alcohol
- Paracetamol or aspirin will reduce fever and muscle aches. Ibuprofen is also suitable.

## How is Influenza spread?

Influenza is a viral disease that is passed from one person to another through the air. You can catch flu through breathing air containing the virus produced when an infected person talks, coughs or sneezes. You can also catch it through touching an infected person or surface contaminated with the virus and then touching your face.

## Other important facts

- Both colds and flu are caused by a virus but the symptoms of influenza are usually more severe
- Antibiotics have no effect against influenza
- Damp or cold cannot cause influenza. However, sudden changes in temperature may cause the symptoms to appear more quickly
- People are seldom infected by the same type of influenza twice because resistance develops within two or four weeks. However, the influenza virus constantly mutates into slightly different versions of itself, which is one reason why vaccination is sometimes ineffective. The vaccination also needs to be done yearly to keep up the person's level of immunity
- It is possible to pass on the infection 1-3 days before you develop the symptoms yourself. You can also pass on the infection until 4 or 5 days after the onset of symptoms. Children, however, tend to be infectious for much longer

If you would like to monitor the spread of swine flu this website has very useful maps:

<http://hisz.rsoe.hu/alertmap/>

If you have any further questions about pandemic planning please contact me directly.

Yours sincerely



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