



H1N1 Influenza 09 (Swine Influenza)

Fact sheet for Community Pharmacy

The most recent version of this document can be found at

www.guild.org.au/healthemergency

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Facts in brief

Australia pandemic alert phase in currently PROTECT

The focus of this phase is to identify and manage those for whom the disease may be severe and provide medical care and interventions to reduce likely suffering

WHO Pandemic Alert Phase is currently Phase 6

This phase indicates that a global pandemic is underway

- People exhibiting MILD flu-like symptoms (who are otherwise healthy) should be advised to stay home, rest, maintain fluids, treat symptoms and avoid human contact where possible until well again
- People exhibiting MODERATE or SEVERE flu-like symptoms should be directed to medical care
- People exhibiting MILD-flu like symptoms who are defined as vulnerable should be directed to medical care
- People exhibiting flu-like symptoms should wear a surgical face mask while in the pharmacy
- Infection control measures should be promoted to your customers and to your staff. This includes:
 - Good hand-washing routine
 - Proper cough/sneeze etiquette
 - Wiping of hard surfaces regularly
- Some pharmacies have been asked to distribute antiviral medicines. If you are unsure of your role in distributing antiviral medicines, refer to communications from your state Guild office in the first instance.

What is H1N1 Influenza 09 influenza?

H1N1 Influenza 09, commonly referred to as swine influenza, is a novel (new) influenza strain to which the global population is not immune. The outbreak of this viral strain was declared by the World Health Organisation (WHO) on 24 April 2009.

Who is at most risk of H1N1 Influenza 09?

As this is a novel virus, anyone is at risk of contracting H1N1 Influenza 09. Some estimates predict that 20% of the Australian population will contract the virus. However, some people are more vulnerable or at higher risk of contracting the virus. Since the outbreak was declared, we have learnt that:

- The virus tends to preferentially infect younger people. The majority of cases have occurred in people under the age of 25 years. In some cases, the viral infection in young people is unexpectedly severe.
- Some people are at higher risk of severe outcomes. Typically people with underlying chronic diseases and pregnant women are at higher risk of severe outcomes. More information about at risk individuals is provided later in this fact sheet.
- Overseas, a small percentage of cases (approximately 2%) have developed severe illness, often with rapid progression to life-threatening pneumonia.

What are the symptoms of swine influenza?

Symptoms of swine influenza closely resemble that of human seasonal influenza. These symptoms can include fever, sweating and chills, cough, sore throat, as well as body aches and pains. Illness may also be accompanied by other symptoms such as headache, tiredness, runny or stuffy nose, diarrhoea and vomiting. These symptoms can range from mild to severe.

To this point, most cases have been mild with symptoms typically of similar or less severity to seasonal influenza. However, the illness can be severe in some. The Commonwealth Government describe the infection as “**mild in most, but severe in some and moderate overall**” (*Protect Phase -Annex to the AHMPPI, 2009*).

Risk of exposure –how is it defined?

The risk of exposure is currently defined as being in physical contact (e.g. hugging or kissing) or being within one metre of a suspected or confirmed case of H1N1 Influenza 09 for more than fifteen minutes. The incubation period may be up to seven days, but it is typically less than three days.

Where H1N1 Influenza 09 has been assessed to be present in an area, anyone who presents with an acute respiratory illness is considered to have H1N1 Influenza 09.

What is the current situation regarding H1N1 Influenza 09 in Australia?

The Commonwealth Government has invoked a new level of Australia's pandemic alert titled PROTECT. This pandemic phase sits along side the CONTAIN and SUSTAIN phase. The PROTECT phase recognises that the virus is now widespread among the Australian community. The PROTECT phase focuses on identifying the people in whom disease may be severe and providing medical care and interventions to reduce likely suffering.

The key elements of the PROTECT phase are:

- Identifying the vulnerable in whom H1N1 Influenza 09 may have severe outcomes
- Focus on early treatment as those identified as vulnerable, and those with moderate or severe illness
- Voluntary home isolation for those who are sick. Contacts will not be placed in quarantine
- Only testing those with moderate or severe disease, those in institutional settings, or those who are vulnerable.

The current World Health Organisation level of influenza pandemic alert is Phase 6. Phase 6 is characterized by community level outbreaks in at least one other country in a different WHO region in addition to the criteria defined in Phase 5. Designation of this phase will indicate that a global pandemic is under way.

Each State and Territory Government has their own pandemic plan. There is variation between these plans. State and Territory plans can be found on government websites, which are listed at the end of this fact sheet. Members should become familiar with their jurisdictions plan.

What about customers who are experiencing flu-like symptoms?

Customers experiencing MILD flu-like symptoms who are who are otherwise healthy should:

- Stay at home until well.
- Avoid contact with people where possible
- Clean hands regularly and thoroughly with soap and water or an alcohol based rub; and
- Use symptomatic relief, such as cold and flu medicines and analgesics. Customers should be advised to maintain fluids and rest until well again.

Consumers who are at risk (see definitions below) or who are experiencing moderate or severe symptoms should seek medical attention.

Consumers who would like further advice in this area are urged to contact the swine influenza hotline (180 2007) or seek medical attention.

Staff exhibiting flu-like symptoms should report this to a manager and not report to work until well again. If a staff member becomes unwell while at work, they should be offered a surgical mask and relieved of their duties until well again.

Who are vulnerable or at risk of severe outcomes?

The *Protect Phase –Annex to the AHMPPI¹* defines those considered vulnerable to severe outcome from H1N1 Influenza 09. The following groups are considered ‘at risk’:

- Chronic respiratory conditions, such as
 - Asthma
 - Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease
- Pregnant women (particularly in second and third trimesters)
- Persons with morbid obesity
- Indigenous people of any age
- Persons with chronic illness predisposing to severe influenza such as:
 - Cardiac disease (excluding simple hypertension)
 - Diabetes mellitus,
 - Chronic metabolic diseases,
 - Chronic renal disease,
 - Haemoglobinopathies,
 - Immunosuppressed (including cancers, HIV/AIDS infection, drugs)
 - Chronic neurological conditions

The following groups are considered less at risk, but require a higher level of monitoring to the general population: smokers, people with obstructive sleep apnoea, children under the age of 5 years and pregnant women in the first trimester.

What measures can I take to reduce the risk of seasonal and H1N1 influenza 09 infection to me and my staff?

Infection control measures encouraged to prevent and limit seasonal influenza are the same as those to limit the spread of a H1N1 Influenza 09. Hence, good infection control measures are of heightened importance at this time. The measures outlined below will help you and your staff minimise the risk of contracting and transferring seasonal or swine influenza:

Prevent

- *Consider vaccination:* A vaccination for H1N1 Influenza 09 is being developed. Seasonal influenza vaccination is recommended for at risk individuals, including health care workers.
- *Wash your hands thoroughly and regularly* to avoid transmitting microbes between people or between surfaces people may touch. If soap and water is unavailable, use antimicrobial hand gels.
- *Wipe pharmacy surfaces* regularly with antimicrobial cleaning products or mild detergents.
- *Avoid touching your face*, particularly the mouth and nose
- *Maintain a healthy lifestyle:* Regular exercise, nutritious diet, minimising stress and developing good sleep habits help your immune system stay strong.

Limit

- *Don't spread the flu:* Cough and sneeze into disposable tissues, or into the crook of your elbow, rather than your hands. Hands spread germs!
- *Wash hands thoroughly and regularly* with warm soapy water to avoid passing microbes to other people or other surfaces.
- Staff affected by influenza should stay home and not return to work until two days after fever subsides. If ill people need to be in public places, maintain personal distance (1.5m) from people wherever possible, to avoid spreading influenza.
- Those who are sick may wear a surgical mask when in contact with others to prevent them infecting others

What is the role of face masks?

The Commonwealth Government's National Incident Room has provided us with the following advice:

- *We do not advise the routine use of face masks by pharmacists and pharmacy staff.*
- Surgical masks should be offered to any person who is a suspected case of H1N1 Influenza 09 to reduce their risk of infecting others.

Unless advice from local health authorities indicates otherwise, there is currently no need for consumers to stockpile face masks.

There have been discussions in media outlets regarding different types of face masks. The definitions below are for information only.

Surgical masks –simple gauze mask which provides limited protection against airborne particles.

P2 masks (also known as N95 masks in the United States). These masks form an airtight seal around the nose and mouth. Some P2 masks have a respirator attached to increase ease of breathing. These masks are significantly more expensive than surgical masks. If used correctly, these masks offer a higher level of protection than surgical masks. Training is required to use these masks correctly. P2 masks are generally intended for use in acute health care settings (eg. hospitals).

Travellers may wish to purchase masks. It is important that they take sufficient supply given that a mask needs to be replaced regularly and in particular if moist.

What is the current advice regarding oral antiviral medicines?

Members are advised:

- Use of oral antiviral medicines is only warranted on the advice of the local public health unit. In the PROTECT phase, local health authorities are likely to recommend treatment for individuals who have contracted H1N1 Influenza 09 and are at risk of complications, or are experiencing severe symptoms.
- In these cases, antiviral medicines will be provided through State and Territory health services. In some areas community pharmacies have been asked to supply antiviral medicines from government stockpiles. Members who are unsure of their role in supplying antiviral medicines should refer to communications from their State Branch in the first instance, or contact their branch directly.
- The prophylactic use of antiviral agents for overseas travel may be appropriate for some travellers. Intending overseas travellers should consult www.smarttraveller.gov.au for information relevant to their itinerary.
- The current advice from WHO is that Tamiflu® and Relenza® is active against H1N1 Influenza 09.

Oseltamivir and zanamivir are Prescription Only Medicines. Consumers should be advised that seeking prescriptions and supply for the purposes of stockpiling these products is unwarranted.

What information sources are available for my customers?

The Commonwealth Government has set up a hotline for the public to receive health information about the outbreak overseas of H1N1 Influenza 09. The National Hotline phone number is 180 2007

The Guild has developed additional resources regarding seasonal influenza and H1N1 influenza 09 which may be of benefit to your staff or to consumers. These resources are updated as required. A consumer fact card which can be printed for consumers can be found on our website at <http://www.guild.org.au/healthemergency>

Where can I find the most up-to-date information?

The Pharmacy Guild is keeping a close watch on developments in Australia and internationally. Members will be kept informed of developments which will affect community pharmacy via our website (www.guild.org.au/healthemergency) and our other communication channels.

In addition to this, members may find the following information sources useful:

- www.healthemergency.gov.au –Department of Health and Ageing
- www.fightflu.gov.au -General information about influenza
- www.health.gov.au/pandemic -Information about planning for an influenza pandemic
- State and territory health department have state specific information on pandemic planning on their websites. See below for details.

Key Information Sources

National Hotline
180 2007

The Pharmacy Guild Information Portal
www.guild.org.au/healthemergency

State and Territory H1N1 Influenza 09 Resources

New South Wales	www.health.nsw.gov.au/publichealth/swine_flu.asp
Victoria	www.health.vic.gov.au/ideas/diseases/swine-influenza
Queensland	www.health.qld.gov.au/swineflu/
Western Australia	www.health.wa.gov.au/swine_flu/home/
South Australia	www.flu.sa.gov.au/Swineflu.aspx
Northern Territory	www.health.nt.gov.au/Centre_for_Disease_Control/index.aspx
Tasmania	www.pandemic.tas.gov.au/
ACT	www.health.act.gov.au

¹ AHMPPI –Australian Health Management Plan for Pandemic Influenza. This information has been provided in good faith by The Pharmacy Guild of Australia for its members and is of a general nature only. Members should consider this information in the context of their state influenza pandemic plan. Individuals should seek advice from their health care professional or relevant to their circumstance. Should there be a conflict between the information in this fact sheet and information provided by a government authority, individuals should act on the information provided by their government authority.