

HEALTH UPDATE TO EMERGENCY DEPARTMENTS ABOUT REPORTS OF SWINE FLU.

This alert is to notify Emergency Department staff that new strains of H1N1 influenza has been identified in an outbreak in Mexico and USA.

The new strains cause a spectrum of severity (from mild to life-threatening) of clinical disease compared to those of 'seasonal' strains endemic to Australia. No cases of this strain have been identified in Australia.

This notice is being provided to inform Emergency Departments of the possibility of people infected with the new influenza strains presenting and to provide advice on the management of potential cases.

Outbreak of new strain of influenza.

An outbreak of severe pneumonia has been identified in Mexico and the south-western States of the USA. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) 878 cases of pneumonia have occurred, causing 62 deaths since March 2009. In 8 cases identified in the USA a new strain of H1N1 influenza has been isolated. This virus appears to be derived from a strain of swine influenza.

There are reports of these strains of influenza causing pneumonia in some individuals. The rate of pneumonia with these strains has not been determined.

The majority of cases in Mexico have occurred in healthy young adults. The degree of infectivity of the virus is not known but close family contacts and health care workers may be at risk.

Antiviral sensitivity testing has indicated the virus is sensitive to oseltamivir and zanamivir, but is resistant to amantadine.

No cases of this strain of influenza have been identified in Australia.

Management of potential cases of new influenza strain.

Clinical information is limited.

Emergency Departments are asked to consider a traveller who presents with:

- a) an Influenza Like Illness (ILI) (fever and cough and fatigue) and who has travelled to Mexico or California, Arizona, New Mexico or Texas in the past two weeks
- or

- b) pneumonia and who has travelled to Mexico or California, Arizona, New Mexico or Texas in the past two weeks

as potentially infected with the new strain of influenza A.

People who are potentially infected should be managed as follows:

- Please notify Communicable Disease Control Branch (CDCB) on number below. .
- Patients who are potential cases of the new influenza strain should be triaged for rapid review to avoid the potential for cross infection in the waiting room.
- All staff in the immediate clinical care team should implement protective measures including a face-shield-mask and gloves, with attention to frequent hand hygiene.
- Patients should be managed in respiratory isolation where possible and potential cases should be co-located in the Emergency Department.

Laboratory testing to confirm or exclude influenza A should be performed. A throat swab, for influenza virus PCR and culture is recommended. Please notify the on call microbiologist so that the specimen can be processed urgently.

- Suspect (clinical) cases should be notified to CDCB. This will assist in arranging further diagnostic testing and community contact management.
- Staff should be vaccinated against seasonal influenza as per usual precautions for seasonal influenza. Seasonal influenza vaccine is unlikely to fully protect against the new strain of influenza virus.
- If not admitted, suspect cases should be requested to stay at home, not go to work, until influenza A is excluded.

For further information:

CDCB 24 hour on call number 82267177

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