

Swine Flu (H1N1) Update for Branches and Regions September 2009

Latest news: -

- In the week leading up to 11 September 2009 the number of reported cases was 3000¹ which was a drop of 2000 from the previous week.
- At the same time, in Scotland the number of cases stood at 1,168 with the highest number being reported in Tayside.²
- The majority of cases continue to be mild.
- As at 11 September 2009, 140 patients needed hospitalisation.³
- The number of deaths as a result of swine flu stands at 66 in England, 1 in Wales, 1 in Northern Ireland and 8 in Scotland.⁴
- Countries in the southern hemisphere have now passed their winter flu epidemic. Flu activity in Australia is now returning to baseline levels and in total there have been 35,897 confirmed cases.⁵

NHS Social Partnership Forum⁶:-

The NHS Social Partnership Forum (SPF) has recently held two briefings on swine flu. It has issued a joint statement which you can read in full at:

<http://www.socialpartnershipforum.org/News/Pages/SPFStatementonthecurrentdiscussionsonswineflu.aspx>

Issues currently under consideration are:

- Sickness absence policies: avoiding the danger of staff returning to work when they have swine flu because existing policy penalises them if they don't. The SPF has identified a clear need to work collaboratively with staff side colleagues at a local level.
- Issues around self-certification and relieving the burden on GPs: perhaps temporarily extending the period of self certificate from 7 days to 10 or 14 days. Discussions have taken place regarding this at COBRA (Cabinet Office Briefing Room A) the emergency cross-government planning group which meets as and when it is necessary. It is possible the NHS could extend it's own self-certification period.
- A potential relaxation of the Working Time regulations – extending the reference period to 52 weeks.
- Temporary revision and extension of arrangements for taking of TOIL and carry-over of annual leave

¹ Health Protection Agency weekly up dates (10th September 2009)

² <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/News/Releases/2009/09/10134301>

³ Figure includes England and Scotland only

⁴ Health protection Agency & government web sites

⁵ Chief Medical Officer (England) weekly up date (10th September 2009)

⁶ Social partnership forum <http://www.socialpartnershipforum.org/Pages/home.aspx>

Swine Flu Workforce Planning: -

- The Swine Flu Workforce Planning Group has continued to meet fortnightly. It has developed specific advice and guidance on the role of medical students during a pandemic and UNISON is now producing similar information for nursing students.
- Together with the intensive care group, the planning group has produced specific advice in relation to ITU beds and increasing capacity in the event of significant case numbers. You can read the document in full at http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publichealth/Flu/Swineflu/DH_104989
Comparable information has been produced in Scotland which you can access at <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/News/Releases/2009/09/10140756>
- The General Medical Council (GMC), the Health Professions Council (HPC) and the Nursing & Midwifery Council (NMC) have produced guidance on acting outside your normal clinical areas during the pandemic.
HPC guidance: www.hpc-uk.org/mediaandevents/statements/swineflu/
NMC guidance at www.nmc-uk.org/aArticle.aspx?ArticleID=3857
- UNISON has worked collaboratively with the employers side to develop a series of “frequently asked questions” you can view some of these at: <http://www.nhsemployers.org/PlanningYourWorkforce/Pandemic-influenza/PandemicFluLatestNews/Pages/Frequently-asked-questions.aspx>
Please continue to check the NHS Employers website as new questions are regularly being developed.
- We have also helped to produce model contracts⁷ which could be used as honorary contracts, for example, if a nurse or doctor needs to return to the service or for those who wish to volunteer during the pandemic.
You can view these at: <http://www.nhsemployers.org/PlanningYourWorkforce/Pandemic-influenza/PandemicFluLatestNews/Pages/Model-agreement-for-volunteers.aspx>
- The cabinet office has produced an update on services, workforce and swine flu planning assumptions you can read this in full at: <http://www.nhsemployers.org/Pages/home.aspx>
- Advice has been produced in England regarding the ambulance service you can read the Pandemic influenza toolkit for NHS ambulance services in England at http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_104801

Vaccination:-

- Vaccination has been an important topic for discussion at the NHS Social Partnership Forum.
- The Department of Health (England) has announced the recommendations of the Immunisation and Vaccine Group. You can read these at <http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publichealth/Flu/Swineflu/InformationandGuidance/Vaccinationprogramme/index.htm>
The priority groups for vaccination will include those who are most vulnerable to developing the disease, such as patients with chronic or long term conditions or

⁷ <http://www.nhsemployers.org/Pages/home.aspx>

those whose immunity may be compromised as a result of treatment e.g. chemotherapy. In terms of staff, individuals providing direct care in frontline NHS & social care services will be a workforce priority. UNISON will be issuing further advice to regions & branches on this in the week commencing 21 September 2009. Information is also available on the NHS Employers website here:

<http://www.nhsemployers.org/PlanningYourWorkforce/Pandemic-influenza/PandemicFluLatestNews/Pages/Vaccination-programme.aspx>

- UNISON is recommending that members have the swine flu vaccine in addition to the seasonal winter flu vaccine. We will be developing a poster to promote this shortly.
- Many of our members & patients will be worried about the vaccine. It is important that we produce robust and easy to understand information which provides answers to the questions and concerns members will have and explains what the vaccine is and the implications for not having it.
- A number of our members will be administering the vaccine in a variety of healthcare settings. It is vital that local negotiations and discussion take place to identify who should administer it, under what protocol and in what environment. This will also enable both sides to better understand who the frontline staff are within your organisation.
- The European Medicines Agency (the regulator for vaccines and medicines in Europe) had been working for some time on a pathway to regulate a vaccine in preparation for bird flu. Over the last five years they have been able to develop a European protocol which enables them to test and licence the vaccine in a shorter period of time. However, it must be stressed that this has not been at the expense of safety or quality control measures in the development or licensing process. You can read more about the vaccination at:
<http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publichealth/Flu/Swineflu/InformationandGuidance/Vaccinationprogramme/index.htm>