

Attention: All primary health care staff!

Infection control for primary health care

Potential pandemic influenza

All primary health facilities can take steps now to prepare for the potential outbreak of pandemic influenza in New Zealand.

Here are some simple things you can do now.

Initial precautions

Such a major health event can only be handled by the whole general practice or Accident & Medical (A&M) team and we suggest you involve your team in any planning and preparation. Do not forget the cleaner. Your first suspicion of influenza in your community may come through a phone call. Consider how you will deal with this.

We recommend that all staff be vaccinated each year against seasonal influenza. While this may not protect against pandemic influenza, it will maintain the general wellness of your team. Create an expectation that sick staff should stay at home.

Initial precautions for people dealing with someone suspected of having pandemic influenza include:

- **Keep your distance**
One metre is accepted as safe and significantly reduces your exposure
- **Wear a surgical mask and gloves**
Also offer a mask to any patient and support people
- **Rigorous, frequent hand washing**
Wash in warm water with soap, or use an alcohol-based hand gel. Dry hands with paper towels
- Where possible try to separate patients with respiratory symptoms from other patients
- **Ventilation**
Keep windows open if possible.
Information on air-conditioning is on the Ministry of Health website:
www.moh.govt.nz/pandemicinfluenza

Each general practice or A&M should promote hand washing and the use of tissues when coughing or sneezing.

- **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)**

These are only necessary when resuscitating patients. We recommend each practice has two kits.

- **Include in your plan:**
 - How to handle patient care equipment and soiled linen
 - Environmental cleaning and spills management
 - Appropriate waste disposal processes
 - Support for staff to regularly monitor their own health.

Patients should:

- Be isolated if possible. If single rooms are not available, suspected cases may be grouped in one area
- Be encouraged to wear a dry surgical mask
- Be asked to cough/sneeze into a tissue and to dispose of the tissue afterwards, then wash hands in warm water with soap or use an alcohol-based hand gel. Dry hands thoroughly afterwards.

Essential supplies

- Gloves
- Surgical masks
- At least two PPE kits
- Disposable thermometers
- Tissues – for both waiting and consulting rooms
- Waste disposal bins and medical waste disposal bags – with lids for infection control
- Soap or alcohol-based hand gel and paper towels for drying.

For further information:

Website: www.moh.govt.nz/pandemicinfluenza

Medsafe: www.medsafe.govt.nz

Numbers: 0800 IMMUNE (466863) for queries about seasonal influenza

Healthline – 0800 611 116

0800 AVN FLU (286358) for general information on Avian Flu

PPE interim guidelines, on website under information for health professionals.