



PLANNING FOR PANDEMIC INFLUENZA: Information for patients

November 2005

Health professionals are concerned about strains of viruses (like bird flu) that could change to infect humans, causing a pandemic. They may one day affect New Zealand. Don't be alarmed – be prepared. There are a few commonsense things you can do to lessen any risk.

Be prepared for disasters and emergencies (including pandemic influenza):

- Store food and water at home to last for one to two weeks, with bottles filled to the top
- Write the phone number of your GP in an obvious place – if you haven't got a GP, get one
- Hold adequate supplies of your regular medications
- Buy extra supplies of paracetamol (Pamol, Panadol or similar) and rehydration fluids. Remember not to give aspirin to children under 16.

To avoid getting sick if the pandemic arrives in New Zealand:

- Remember those good house-keeping tips you got from your grandmother – open your windows (if you can) to ventilate your home properly and maintain air flow
- Where possible, keep your distance from others, at least one metre is good to reduce the spread of this virus
- Keep coughs and sneezes covered. Tissues are best; either flush down the toilet or put the tissue straight in a rubbish bin
- Rigorous, frequent hand washing with soap and water will help, with good hand drying
- Use your own towel to thoroughly dry your hands – change these often. Or use paper towels
- Stay away from groups and stay home if possible. Schools may close to avoid spreading infection. Some workers may be advised to work from home, so your whole family may well be at home.

Managing illness:

- Most sick people may have to be looked after at home
- If you live alone, stay in regular phone contact with family and friends
- Remember to keep coughs and sneezes covered and wash and dry your hands afterwards
- When nursing sick family you should use a mask, or use a tissue or even a clean cloth as a mask. If the mask gets wet it needs to be changed
- To reduce fever
 - drink lots of fluids
 - take paracetamol according to the directions on the label
 - sponge bathe or take a tepid bath – don't 'wrap up warm'.

When to phone your doctor or primary health care nurse:

If you have recently returned from overseas and are feeling unwell with symptoms such as cough, fever, sore throat, runny nose, headaches or muscle aches, phone your general practice for advice. They will tell you what to do.

DO NOT VISIT YOUR DOCTOR'S SURGERY UNANNOUNCED

What about Using Medication?

There is currently no vaccine against pandemic influenza, although there may be in the future. If you are interested in obtaining the anti-viral medication **Tamiflu**, talk to your GP. This medication is designed to help reduce your symptoms when you get sick. However it may not work against this strain of bird influenza so do not rely on it as your only defence.

The Royal New Zealand College of General Practitioners and the New Zealand College of Practice Nurses will continue, as we learn more, to update this advice.

For further information, <http://www.moh.govt.nz/pandemicinfluenza>