



27 June 2009

Torres Strait message on human swine flu protection

People in the Torres Strait need to take precautions, but not be alarmed following confirmation of a case of H1N1 Influenza A (Human Swine Influenza) in the region, Queensland Health's Chief Health Officer, Dr Jeannette Young, said today.

"Queensland health and other agencies have changed the response to the virus recently to give an even stronger focus to efforts to protect vulnerable and high-risk groups – this includes Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal Queenslanders.

"We have sent antivirals and personal protective equipment to remote Indigenous communities and we are undertaking a campaign to get information on precautions and prevention out to them.

"Because Indigenous Australians have a higher incidence of other medical conditions we need to make sure we tailor the response to meet their circumstances and vulnerabilities.

"Anyone with existing chronic health conditions is at a higher risk of having swine flu and suffering complications.

"Our health care professionals and communities will be getting all possible support to respond to this case of human swine flu.

"If anyone has typical symptoms of influenza such as fever with cough or sore throat, they should see their local health service as soon as possible for assessment as well as for testing and treatment if necessary.

"People should also talk to their local health service about getting vaccinated against 'normal' seasonal flu. While this does not protect against this human swine flu strain, it does give protection against other strains in circulation and is of benefit."

Dr Young said there was nothing exceptional about the best way for indigenous people and others to protect themselves against this virus or 'normal' influenza:

- Wash hands regularly with soap and water for at least 15–20 seconds or use an alcohol-based hand rub to remove any viruses that may have been picked up.
- Avoid contact with people who have flu or flu-like symptoms.
- Avoid crowded areas such as major events with large crowds.
- Avoid travel where there are many people in an enclosed space, such as planes.
- If you need to travel take precautions, and see a doctor as soon as possible if you become unwell.

More follows....

“Smokers are also at risk and should give up or at least reduce their smoking, and not smoke near anyone else who is ill or at risk,” Dr Young said.

Dr Young said the Torres Strait case of the virus was confirmed in a teenage male Islander.

“His symptoms were mild and he is recovering well,” Dr Young said. “He was not treated with antivirals as he presented several days after the onset of symptoms. However, he was asked to remain in isolation at home until today.

“Contact tracing and screening of potential cases is being undertaken in the teenager’s community. Antivirals are available for the community if needed.”

Dr Young said those who are vulnerable include indigenous people of all ages as well as pregnant women and those with respiratory disease (asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease), heart disease, diabetes, renal disease, obesity and immunosuppression.

“It is important that the general public is aware of the impact that the virus and influenza generally can have on vulnerable and high-risk groups,” she said.

“They can help in minimising the spread and severity of the disease through measures such as good hand and respiratory hygiene, and staying at home if they are unwell.

“People not in a vulnerable or high-risk group who have mild symptoms generally do not need to seek medical advice and will not be tested or provided with antivirals. If concerned they should consult a medical practitioner by phone or call 13 HEALTH (13 43 25 84).”

More information on swine flu is available from 13 HEALTH (13 43 25 84), the Commonwealth Swine Influenza Hotline 1802007, or the Queensland Health website at <http://www.health.qld.gov.au/swineflu/>

Media contact: Ph 32354248