

Public Information Update from Department of Health

Swine Flu - Thursday 30 April

The Situation

The WHO has changed the alert to WHO Phase 5. This means there has been person-to-person spread but it is still localised. We are still not in a pandemic phase. In real terms stage five won't look that different in the UK.

We have been preparing for the possibility of a pandemic for a number of years and are among the most prepared countries in the world. The NHS has developed its planning from a national, local and individual level and our plans are robust and advanced.

If you have flu like symptoms and are concerned, stay at home, if you can go online check your symptoms on the symptom checker on www.nhs.uk or call the swine flu information line on 0800 1 513 513. If you have taken these steps and are still concerned call your GP or NHS Direct.

Latest statement

A Department of Health spokesperson said:

"There have been three more confirmed cases of swine flu in the UK - two in London and one in the North East. There are now eight confirmed cases in the UK - six in England and two in Scotland.

"Phase five indicates that WHO considers a global pandemic to be imminent. A change to phase five is a signal to countries' governments to ramp up their pandemic preparations – which we are already doing.

"The preparations we have in place and are continuing to make will help to ensure we respond well in the event of a pandemic.

"Everyone needs to play their part to protect and prepare themselves and their families. There are simple steps that everyone can take to help prevent catching colds and flu based on good respiratory and hand hygiene.

"Always use a tissue to catch your sneezes, throw away used tissues where germs can linger and regularly wash your hands."

What does level five mean?

Phase five indicates that WHO considers a global pandemic to be imminent, whereas at phase four a global pandemic is not inevitable. This means there has been person-to-person spread but it is still localised.

We are still not in a pandemic phase.

A change to phase five is a signal to countries' governments to ramp up their pandemic preparations – which we are already doing. In real terms stage five won't look that different in the UK.

Preparedness

We have been preparing for the possibility of a pandemic for a number of years and are among the most prepared countries in the world.

The NHS has developed its planning from a national, local and individual level and our plans are robust and advanced.

Antivirals and Antibiotics

- We have built up a significant stockpile of the antiviral drugs, tamiflu and relenza, to prepare for this situation. Both these drugs have proved effective in relieving the symptoms of those who have been infected.
- But we will now increase this stockpile to cover 80 per cent of the population. This does not mean that we expect anywhere near this number of people to be affected. It does mean that we will have enough antiviral drugs to treat 50 million people, and make sure that all frontline NHS staff have their own supplies of antivirals as a preparatory measure.
- In addition to increasing availability of antivirals, we are increasing our stockpiles of antibiotics. While antibiotics have no impact on the flu virus, they will be essential for dealing with any complications such as pneumonia, which might arise from infection.

Facemasks

- There is no convincing scientific evidence that the widespread issue of facemasks to healthy members of the public can stop this disease spreading. Moreover, they give can false reassurance, and can encourage people to ignore basic and straightforward hand hygiene measures which have proven effectiveness.
- However, specialist and other types of facemasks are useful for frontline NHS staff who are caring for infected patients, if they are the appropriate type; worn correctly; changed frequently; removed properly; disposed of safely and used in combination with good hygiene measures.

- Although we have a supply of facemasks for NHS staff, we do need more. In the past 24 hours, we have completed contracts for over 60 million masks which will start becoming available from this week. These will be both surgical and respiratory masks, which will give staff a broad range of protection when they come into contact with infected patients.

Public Information Campaign

- To keep the public informed, a mass public health campaign has begun with print, TV and radio adverts.
- The adverts will warn the public about swine flu and remind people to cover their noses and mouths with tissues when they cough and sneeze and then throw the tissue away and wash their hands.
- The message is simple: CATCH IT. BIN IT. KILL IT.
- Members of the public who want further information can ring a single number, 0800 1 513 513, for regular recorded updates on the current situation.
- In addition, a leaflet will be dropped through people's doors from next Tuesday (not everyone will get this on Tuesday, it will take a few days to get around the country).

Phase	
3	Human infection(s) with a new subtype, but no (or rare) person-to-person spread to a close contact
4	Small cluster(s) with limited person-to-person transmission but spread is highly localised, suggesting that the virus is not well adapted to humans
5 – Current Alert	Large cluster(s) but person-to-person spread still localised, suggesting that the virus is becoming increasingly better adapted to humans
6	Increased and sustained transmission in general population UK alert levels 1 Virus/cases only outside the UK 2 Virus isolated in the UK 3 Outbreak(s) in the UK 4 Widespread activity across the UK