

MH 34:03

25 April 2009

All Registered Medical Practitioners

MOH CIRCULAR 17/2009
ALERT: SWINE INFLUENZA A (H1N1)

In Mexico, as of 23 April 2009, 854 cases of severe atypical pneumonia have been reported, including 59 deaths. Several cases have been confirmed as swine Influenza A (H1N1). Those affected included healthcare workers and their family members with close contact. Most of the cases have occurred in central Mexico (especially Mexico City) but there have been cases in states along the U.S.-Mexico border. Schools and public institutions such as museums, libraries and theatres have been closed in Mexico City.

2 In the US, there have been a total of 8 laboratory confirmed cases of swine influenza (6 in Southern California and 2 in Texas). 6 cases had self-limited illness and 1 was hospitalized. No deaths have been reported. No recent exposure to pigs has been identified for any of the patients. In one case, there was a history of recent travel to Mexico.

3 Preliminary genetic analysis of the influenza viruses have identified them as swine Influenza A (H1N1 viruses), containing genetic segments from swine influenza viruses from North America, Europe and Asia, avian influenza viruses from North America, and human influenza viruses. This particular genetic combination of swine influenza has not been recognized previously. The US CDC laboratory has identified the same strain of swine Influenza A (H1N1) in specimens from patients with respiratory disease in Mexico as that identified in the US cases.

4 These reports raise concerns about human-to-human spread of a novel influenza virus.

Clinical Symptoms

5 The symptoms of swine influenza in humans are similar to human seasonal influenza. These include fever, sore throat, cough and rhinorrhoea. Some patients may also complain of nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, myalgia, and headache. The disease may be complicated by pneumonia. Most of the cases have been in younger adults but older adults have not been spared.

Laboratory Investigation

6 The diagnosis of swine influenza may be confirmed by laboratory identification and sub-typing of the virus in naso-pharyngeal swabs obtained from suspected cases.

Treatment and Vaccination

7 It is likely that the current seasonal influenza vaccine will not provide protection from this new subtype of influenza A. The viruses in the US patients have demonstrated antiviral resistance to amantadine and rimantadine. However, they are susceptible to oseltamivir (Tamiflu®) and zanamivir (Relenza®).

REQUIRED ACTION

8 Clinicians should observe strict infection control precautions when handling patients:

- a) Presenting with influenza-like symptoms (fever, cough, sore throat, rhinorrhoea); AND
- b) Have a history of travel to affected areas (i.e. Mexico, and the states of California and Texas in the United States) in the 7 days prior to the onset of symptoms; OR have been in contact with ill persons who had a history of travel to these areas in the 7 days prior to the onset of symptoms.

9 Any patient who meets the case definition in Paragraph 8 should be referred immediately to the Emergency Medicine Department at Tan Tock Seng Hospital. Medical practitioners should arrange for these patients to be transferred by ambulance by calling the dedicated ambulance service at 65860237 (available 24 hours).

10 The Ministry of Health should also be **notified immediately** of suspected cases. Please contact the Communicable Diseases Division at 98171463 (available 24 hours). MOH will inform the notifying doctor of the need for contact tracing and prophylaxis for close contacts of the case once the diagnosis has been established.

ADVICE TO PATIENTS

11 Physicians should advise family members and other close contacts of suspected cases to be vigilant for early symptoms of influenza, and to seek medical advice as early as possible if unwell.

FURTHER INFORMATION

12 An FAQ sheet for patients is attached at Annex 1.

13 For updates on this evolving situation, please refer to the MOH website www.moh.gov.sg

14 For further clarifications of this circular, please email moh_info@moh.gov.sg.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'K Satku', with a horizontal line extending to the right.

PROF K SATKU
DIRECTOR OF MEDICAL SERVICES