

10 June 2009

MEDIA RELEASE

If you think you may have influenza A (H1N1) “Swine Flu” stay put – dial a doctor or Healthline...don’t just turn up at a medical centre or hospital

Director of Public Health, Dr Mark Jacobs says it’s important that people who think they may have influenza A (H1N1) Swine Flu, stay put and phone for medical advice first.

“When someone turns up to see their GP without phoning first, and is infectious with influenza A (H1N1) there’s potential for the virus to spread to others in the waiting room,” Dr Jacobs said.

There are two groups of people who need to heed this advice:

1. People who have returned from overseas (in the past seven days) and become unwell with influenza symptoms
2. People who are close contacts of a confirmed case of influenza A (H1N1) and develop influenza symptoms. (This can include family, or people who live in the same household, workmates, friends and other people “a case” had close contact with while they were infectious.)

“This week we have had to isolate members of the public who were in a waiting room, along with staff from medical centres who came into close contact with a person who is now a confirmed case,” Dr Jacobs said.

The influenza virus spreads very easily – via droplets in the air when a person coughs or sneezes and doesn’t cover it up. The germs can live on hard surfaces for 48 hours.

“Our advice is to cover up your coughs and sneezes with a tissue. Put it in a bin straight away. If you don’t have a tissue handy, bend your arm and sneeze into your elbow to stop germs spreading through the air. Wash and dry your hands thoroughly, particularly after coughing or sneezing. It’s also important to stay away from sick people...and if you’re sick, stay at home.

“The most important thing for people to remember is if they believe they may have Influenza A (H1N1) to phone first – dial a doctor! Don’t just turn up at a doctor’s surgery or hospital. If you’re unsure about your symptoms or what to do...phone Healthline 0800 611 116 for free advice 24 hours a day, seven days a week,” Dr Jacobs said.

ENDS

For further information

Symptoms of Influenza

Symptoms can include fever and chills, a cough, sore throat, body aches and pains, headache, extreme tiredness, and a sore chest. Some people may also suffer vomiting and diarrhoea.