

Avian Influenza and Pandemic Planning

Update 3
17 November 2005

This issue reports progress on some of the wide range of work being undertaken as New Zealand enhances its preparedness for an influenza pandemic. There has been increasing attention on the work being done by the Ministry, and other government departments.

International situation

As at November 14 there have been 126 confirmed cases of H5N1 in humans, with 64 deaths, since 26 December 2003. Vietnam continues to report the highest number of cases. The cumulative number of confirmed human cases reported to the World Health Organization (WHO) since December 2003 can be found at http://www.who.int/csr/disease/avian_influenza/country/cases_table_2005_11_14/en/index.html

Infection in birds has spread through many parts of Asia into Europe. No human cases have yet been reported in Europe. A global update can be found at www.oie.int/downld/AVIAN_INFLUENZA/A_AI-Asia.htm

New Zealand situation

The Minister of Health, the Hon Pete Hodgson, has released the New Zealand Pandemic Influenza Action Plan V 14 to coincide with the Prime Minister's attendance at an APEC meeting in South Korea at which this issue was an important agenda item. This version replaces all earlier versions of the plan. It is worth repeating that this plan is a working document providing a framework to support preparedness efforts at a number of levels. The document will be updated as our planning efforts progress, and as we receive input from the health and other sectors. The plan also highlights a range of areas for future potential decision by Government.

The Ministry of Health also recently announced an agreement with an Australian manufacturer for supplies of pandemic vaccine once developed. The supply deal with CSL Ltd, the only influenza vaccine manufacturer in the Southern Hemisphere, gives New Zealand prioritised supply within four to six months of the World Health Organisation identifying the commencement of a pandemic.

There is ongoing work involving the Ministry, Pharmac and Medsafe on issues concerning antibiotic supply, and supply of other medications for non-pandemic related illnesses during a pandemic.

Since the last update, the Ministry of Economic Development released a Critical Infrastructure Guide and an associated Business Continuity Planning Guide which generated a lot of media and other public attention.

Advisory groups

The Pandemic Influenza Technical Advisory Group (PITAG) under the chairmanship of the Ministry's Dr Andrea Forde met on 8 November. The amount of work confronting the committee is such that it has stepped up its schedule and will meet again before Christmas.

The Pandemic Influenza Reference Committee (PIRC), under the chairmanship of John Ayling, is representing more than 30 health sector advisory groups. PIRC are due to meet again soon once DHB plans in response to the revised planning framework have been received.

The Intersectoral Pandemic Group (IPG) continues to meet fortnightly. IPG visited Parliament Buildings on 10 November for a tour of the National Crisis Management Centre (NCMC) facilities.

What's new on the web?

A new leaflet which pulls together existing material on how individuals can prepare has been posted.

The website also now has an inbox for members of the public with queries.

It continues to be a well-used information source. In October www.moh.govt.nz/pandemicinfluenza and www.moh.govt.nz/birdflu were the second and third most visited pages with 11,850 and 6512 visits respectively. The influenza factsheet was downloaded 2569 times.

0800 AVN FLU (0800 286 358)

The 0800 number, operational since the end of October, gives callers four options for further information. They are Preparing for a Pandemic, Protecting Yourself in a Pandemic, Tamiflu and Travel Advice. Callers to the Ministry requesting information being referred to the phone line as a starting point, and in the first fortnight there have been 250 calls with the bulk coming in the first week.

Ministry of Health workstream updates

National reserve of antiviral medication

A final delivery of the anti-viral medicine Tamiflu has arrived bringing the national reserve to 855,000 treatment courses.

Antiviral policy development

The Ministry of Health has been developing a draft policy on the use and distribution of the national stockpile of antivirals in the event of a pandemic. This work has been supported by advice from PITAG and the National Ethics Advisory Committee. Broadly, the current draft antiviral usage policy supports the overall objectives of the pandemic response plan. In the early stages of any response it is anticipated that antivirals will be used in support of border management and cluster control operations, and should a pandemic spread widely they will be used for treating people who become ill. Details of how the stockpile will be prioritised and used can only be confirmed once we know the exact nature of the pandemic and how it behaves in New Zealand. It is very important to stress that antivirals will be only one part of New Zealand's overall response to a pandemic.

Information for primary care

The Ministry is currently printing resources, including posters and brochures, for 10,000 kits for primary care practitioners including GPs, primary health care nurses, and pharmacies. The material includes a pandemic planning guide for practices, travel health advice, best prevention practice, infection control, and information on tamiflu and vaccines. An early version of this material has already been forwarded by email to primary care contacts. The kits will be sent out before the end of November.

Community Based Assessment Centres (CBACs)

A working group to discuss the role and function of community based assessment centres in a pandemic has held its first meeting. A draft document is being prepared that will include advice on:

- role and function
- workforce requirements and options
- facility requirements and options
- the trigger point for when a CBAC may be activated
- how CBACs fit into other clinical service requirements.

The group was clear that while they could provide guidance and principles there was no one-size-fits-all solution and DHBs should have the autonomy to decide the best fit for local requirements. Another important consideration will be the need for DHBs to plan for some form of mobile service to complement CBACs, particularly for smaller rural communities and disadvantaged groups who may otherwise be unable to reach a CBAC. A draft document will be forwarded for sector consultation by the end of November.

Other work on health and disability sector preparedness

The Ministry has begun on a raft of issues in order to provide further guidance. These workstreams include:

- work on patient pathways, models of care and the development of draft clinical treatment protocols
- advice on the role of teleadvice and triage to symptomatic callers in a pandemic

- the role of hospitals and advice on accessing hospitals and allied health services in a pandemic
- guidance on addressing workforce issues
- advice on the care of people in residential care during a pandemic
- advice on the care of people who normally receive home care or support during a pandemic.

This is NOT an all-inclusive list. Guidance will be usually developed initially through the use of sector advisory groups or expertise and will be circulated as draft advice for consultative purposes.

Post-pandemic issues

The psychosocial recovery sub-plan is being developed as part of the National Health Emergency Plan. Part of this work includes establishing a health and disability advisory committee. We'll keep you informed of progress there.

International co-ordination

The Ministry continues to liaise internationally. Most recently Director of Public Health Dr Mark Jacobs attended an APEC meeting in Brisbane. The meeting was designed to address the regional approach to responding to avian and pandemic influenza outbreaks at a high level, and was attended by representatives from all 21 APEC member economies and brought together around 100 regional participants.