

Avian Influenza and Pandemic Planning

Update 8
29 May 2006

This issue includes the latest information on the pandemic preparedness legislation, details about the CBAC workshop held earlier in the month and an update on the international situation.

International situation

Around the world there have now been 218 confirmed cases of human H5N1 infection in 10 countries. 124 of these have been fatal. Further outbreaks of H5N1 in both domestic and wild bird populations have been reported.

WHO have confirmed a family cluster of 8 cases in North Sumatra, Indonesia. Seven of the eight cases have died. Investigations so far haven't indicated any change in the virus's ability to infect and spread between humans.

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_2006_05_23/en/index.html

A Global update can be found at http://www.oie.int/downld/AVIAN%20INFLUENZA/A_AI-Asia.htm

Australian Health Protection Committee meeting

Steve Brazier (NZ National Coordinator, Pandemic Planning) attended the Australian Health Protection Committee meeting in Sydney on 11 and 12 May 2006. New Zealand is a full member of this regular committee, which has been running for a number of years. The Committee deals with health emergency response issues. One full day of the meeting was devoted to pandemic planning issues. The meeting was an opportunity to access some very useful information and policies.

New Zealand situation

Epidemic Preparedness legislation – first reading complete

The first reading of the Law Reform (Epidemic Preparedness) Bill was completed on 9 April. It received cross party support and has been referred to the Government Administration Select Committee, for report back by 31 July 2006.

Interagency Pandemic Group (IPG)

The Interagency Pandemic Group (IPG) met on 4 May. There were updates from Health Legal on the Law Reform (Epidemic Preparedness) Bill and Biosecurity New Zealand on the international situation and New Zealand work.

There were presentations from Volunteering New Zealand on the structures and capabilities in the NZ Volunteer sector, the Ministry of Health on the initial scoping of the Information Management and Reporting work, and from the Ministry of Civil Defence and Emergency Management and the Ministry of Economic Development on Civil Defence and Emergency Management and Infrastructure information management in a pandemic.

The Interagency Pandemic Group is now meeting on a monthly rather than fortnightly basis.

New Zealand Embalmers Association's seminar

John Boyd (Project Manager, Emergency Projects, Public Health Directorate), presented at the New Zealand Embalmers Association's seminar on 11 May about pandemic planning and how this will affect the funeral industry.

Annual Medical Law Conference

The 7th Annual Medical Law Conference was held in Wellington on 15 and 16 May. Amongst the topics addressed, by means of a panel discussion, were the ethical, legal and moral obligations of health practitioners in a pandemic situation. One former and one current member of the Pandemic Influenza Technical Advisory Committee (PITAG) were on this panel. The Ministry was represented by Dr Andrea Forde (Senior Advisor, Public Health Medicine, Public Health Directorate).

Pandemic Influenza Reference Committee (PIRC)

The Pandemic Influenza Reference Committee (PIRC) had a productive meeting on Wednesday 24 May. The committee discussed the criteria by which they would assess the capability of the health sector to manage a response to a pandemic. PIRC considered that strong leadership was required to avoid confusion and to ensure consistency in response nationally. PIRC agreed to form a sub-group to develop a draft of the criteria and a process of assessment.

Other items discussed included the ethical framework developed by the National Ethics Advisory Committee (NEAC) and capacity of Healthline to respond during a pandemic. Garry Smith (CEO Auckland District Health Board and Chair of the DHB Planning Group) also spoke about the status of DHB emergency plans. The regional plans are now also being prepared and testing of the DHB plans is being planned.

The Ministry is currently reviewing the DHB plans and will provide feedback to the DHBs in June.

Ministry of Health workstream updates

Pandemic Intelligence workstream

Border management

Work is being done on refining possible border pandemic response options for version 16 of the Pandemic Action Plan. There will be various inputs to this work including for example the results of New Zealand modeling and the findings of a project looking at possible arrangements and costs of imposing quarantine measures.

Ministry officials met with a number of public health border officials on 12 May. The meeting was organised by Community and Public Health and helped clarify what work was being done nationally and which regionally, and with the intention of sharing the regional workload and ensuring a consistent national response.

Health and Disability Capability workstream

Community Based Assessment Centres (CBACs)

The Ministry of Health-organised workshop, held on 1 May 2006 in Wellington for DHB emergency planners, provided a constructive opportunity for collective discussion and sharing of DHBs' current plans for CBACs.

Info-communications workstream

Pandemic Preparedness Risk Communications Workshop Report

Annie Coughlan attended the APEC Pandemic Preparedness Risk Communications Workshop held in Da Nang, Vietnam on 2 - 4 May. The workshop was led by Canada and involved participants from all APEC economies and the World Health Organization.

The presentations included reports of experiences of those economies who had experienced outbreaks of H5N1 and SARS. Concluding remarks from the workshop by the chair of the APEC health taskforce recognised risk communication as a public health intervention in its own right and that risk communication needed to be relevant, based on research and responsive to changing environments. A report on the workshop is currently being prepared and will be forwarded to the Minister's office.

Pandemic website

The Ministry's flu pandemic website has been revamped. <http://www.moh.govt.nz/pandemicinfluenza> is now easier to use and navigate. Flu pandemic resources have also been put on the website including translations of the flu pandemic brochure and poster and the recent TV and radio ads.