

swine flu

Pandemic update



Ian Dalton, National Director for NHS Flu Resilience, summarises the latest position on swine flu.

I am pleased to report that the swine flu vaccination programme has gathered pace since Christmas, with 4.54 million doses having been administered so far to people in the priority groups, including 518,000 doses given to healthy children over six months and under five years. These figures reflect the tremendous and continued efforts made by GPs and their staff, district nurses and all NHS staff involved in the programme since it began in October 2009.

Pandemic H1N1 (2009) influenza results in a predominantly mild illness for most people, but clinical at-risk groups, pregnant women and young children are at increased risk. The Chief Medical Officer has continued to stress the importance of vaccination to prevent complications, hospital admissions and death in potential future outbreaks of the disease. Vaccination offers the best protection for those at risk of complications from influenza.

I have always been clear that the health care worker vaccination programme is a key governance responsibility for boards. We have seen a significant improvement in the uptake rates in these groups with 400,000 eligible healthcare workers in England having taken up the offer of the vaccine. Staff who wish to be vaccinated against swine flu should be able to receive the vaccine at least up until the beginning of the 2010/11 flu season.

Further, I have asked the boards of all NHS organisations to review their uptake data formally and by 31 March 2010, and assure themselves that their healthcare worker vaccination programmes have met an appropriate performance standard compared to other NHS organisations.

We have continued to seek advice from the Joint Committee for Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) on the vaccination programme and we are now able to set out the expected parameters for its continued delivery by the NHS.

- **People in the clinical risk groups, pregnant women, household contacts of immunocompromised individuals and frontline health and social care workers**

JCVI has advised that unvaccinated people over the age of six months and in clinical risk groups, pregnant women, household contacts of immunocompromised individuals, and frontline health and social care workers should continue to be encouraged to receive the H1N1 vaccine during the coming spring and summer.

- **Healthy children aged over six months and below five years of age**

JCVI has advised that vaccination of healthy children aged over six months and below five years should be completed. PCTs are expected to put plans in place to complete the work for this programme by the end of March 2010.

- **Vaccination for people travelling this summer to the Southern Hemisphere**

JCVI has suggested that the monovalent pandemic H1N1 (2009) influenza vaccine could be offered as a travel vaccine for the benefit of those people travelling to Southern Hemisphere countries during the Southern Hemisphere seasonal influenza season. The Department is currently exploring how this advice might best be implemented.

On 11 February, after a significant decline in numbers of new swine flu cases being reported, the National Pandemic Flu Service (NPFS) was suspended. The NPFS was successful in easing pressure on primary care services during the busiest times of the pandemic, allowing GPs to focus on those who were most ill, ensuring high volumes of people get rapid access to antiviral medicines when they needed them. Anyone who suspects they have swine flu should now contact their GP directly.

Read recent letters sent to clinicians and the NHS at the following link:

www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Lettersandcirculars/Dearcolleagueletters/index.htm