



Pandemic update



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

As of 11 February, the National Pandemic Flu Service (NPFS) will be stood down and all patients with suspected swine flu will be referred to their GPs for advice. This follows a further decline in swine flu numbers over the past month, and UK flu activity now being at, or below, baseline levels for this time of year.

The Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) considers that we have now passed the maximum peak of the UK second wave. It is anticipated that there will be a declining trend in numbers of new cases of pandemic influenza, and it is considered unlikely that there will be a third wave of any significant magnitude. Because of this, the response to the swine flu pandemic has been reviewed to ensure that it is clinically appropriate to the levels of threat posed to the general public and the pressure being put on the NHS.

The NPFS has been hugely successful in easing pressure on primary care services during the busiest times of the pandemic, allowing GPs to focus on those who are most ill, and ensuring high volumes of people get rapid access to antiviral medicines when they need them.

However, the pandemic strain remains in circulation and, although for the majority of people the illness is mild, for some the illness can be more severe.

People who are eligible for the vaccine and who have not yet had it are encouraged to get the jab to protect themselves and others. It is expected that swine flu will return in the 2010 flu season.



SAGE has reviewed the antiviral policy and has advised that GPs can continue to offer treatment to all those with influenza-like illness who wish to receive it, subject to their clinical judgement, until the end of the seasonal flu period in 2010 defined as the end of March 2010 and the Government has accepted this recommendation.

Ian Dalton and Roy Taylor have written in more detail to the NHS and Social Care partners about the latest phase of our operational response to swine flu. The Chief Medical Officer has also updated clinicians.

These letters and current swine flu information can be found at:

www.dh.gov.uk/swineflu