

From the Acting Chief Medical Officer  
Dr Elizabeth Mitchell



Department of  
**Health, Social Services  
and Public Safety**

[www.dhsspsni.gov.uk](http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk)

## URGENT COMMUNICATION

HSS(MD) 17/2009

Chief Executives, HSC Board / Public Health Agency  
Chief Executives, HSC Trusts  
Director of Public Health, Public Health Agency (*for onward distribution to Consultants in Communicable Disease Control, Regional Epidemiologists*)  
Director of Nursing, Public Health Agency  
Directors of Pharmaceutical Services, HSC Board / HSC Trusts / Business Support Organisation  
Director of Primary Care, HSC Board (*for cascade to Out of Hours centres*)  
GP Medical Advisers, HSC Board  
Medical Directors, HSC Trusts (*for onward distribution to, A& E doctors, ID Physicians, Microbiologists, Virologists*).  
Medical Director, NI Ambulance Service  
Nursing Directors, HSC Trusts  
All General Practitioners (*for onward distribution to practice staff including practice nurses*)  
All Community Pharmacists  
Medical Director, RQIA (*for cascade to independent hospitals and clinics*)  
Dr J Mairs, Regional Procurement Pharmacist  
Regional Medicines Information Service  
CVO, DARD  
CSO, AFBI  
Director, FSA  
PHA EOC  
Chief Officer of Prison Healthcare  
Chief Officer of Ambulance Service

AN ROINN

**Sláinte, Seirbhísí Sóisialta  
agus Sábháilteachta Poiblí**

MÄNNYSTRIE O

**Poustie, Resydènter Heisin  
an Fowk Siccar**

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Your Ref:

Our Ref: HSS(MD) 17/2009

Date: 30 April 2009

Dear Colleague

## SWINE FLU – FURTHER COMMUNICATION

Further to my letter HSS(MD)16/2009, dated 25 April which can be accessed on the DHSSPS website at:

[http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/phealth/professional/cmo\\_communications/letters-and-urgent-communications-2009.htm](http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/phealth/professional/cmo_communications/letters-and-urgent-communications-2009.htm) I am writing to update you on the necessary steps in dealing with the current swine flu incident.

Last night the World Health Organisation announced that the current level of influenza pandemic alert had been raised from phase 4 to 5. WHO's decision to raise the pandemic alert to five means that they consider a global pandemic to be imminent, and everyone must

ramp up their pandemic preparations. In Northern Ireland we are already doing this and continue to work very closely with our counterparts across the UK and in the Republic of Ireland.

The key message to the public is not to be alarmed, to continue about their normal business but to be prepared for a potential pandemic. Evidence to date suggests that, other than in Mexico, the majority of cases have had a relatively mild flu-like illness which responds well to treatment with antivirals.

As you will appreciate, the position is subject to frequent change necessitating frequent review of the approach. This is particularly true for those practitioners from whom the public will seek advice directly and will possibly need to undertake unfamiliar procedures in order to deal with these requests competently.

I also wish to clarify the roles of the Department, the Public Health Agency (PHA) and the Health & Social Care Board (HSCB) in managing this incident. The Department will handle the management and communication of issues relating to policy and strategy in NI as well as UK and international level issues. The PHA/HSCB will handle the management and communication of operational service issues in Trusts and primary care.

Significant operational issues should be highlighted to the PHA Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) by email – [pha.eoc@hscni.net](mailto:pha.eoc@hscni.net) or telephone 02890 553997 or 02890 553994. This is also the route of contact for health professionals who need public health advice on suspect cases 8am – 8pm. Outside these hours contact Ambulance Control on 028 90 404021.

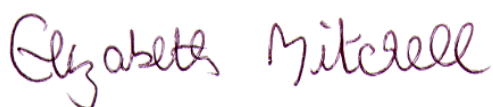
Local operational guidance on the identification of cases for further investigation, and clinical management will be placed on the Public Health Agency's (PHA) website (<http://www.publichealth.hscni.net/>) and updated as necessary.

You should also refer to the clinical algorithm on the Health Protection Agency website frequently, (<http://www.hpa.org.uk/webw/HPAweb&Page&HPAwebAutoListName/Page/1240732817665?p=1240732817665>) particularly when presented with a person who may fulfil the diagnostic criteria for case definition.

A Northern Ireland swine flu helpline number is being established and will be available later today. The number to contact is 0800 0514 142. In addition to the Northern Ireland Swine Flu Helpline number, there is a national UK-wide helpline where you can hear general information on swine flu contact 0800 1 513 513.

I am confident that every recipient of this letter will exercise their professional duty to place the needs of patients before all other considerations at this time.

Yours sincerely



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**Dr E Mitchell**  
**Acting Chief Medical Officer**

