



Executive Science Update **no 7**

APRIL-JUNE 2009

ECDC's reponse to influenza A(H1N1)

ECDC is closely following the development of the present epidemic of influenza A(H1N1). Via our Emergency Operation Centre, ECDC experts and scientists are working closely with the European Commission, WHO and health authorities and agencies inside and outside Europe to assess the risk presented by this new virus and to identify means to counteract its effects.

For as long as necessary, ECDC will continue to monitor the situation and communicate with the European community, providing advice and educational information about influenza A(H1N1) based on the latest scientific data available to our experts. All relevant documents are available on the ECDC website.

Technical documents

Common case definition

At the request of the European Commission, ECDC provided a technical document which served as basis for a European case definition that was adopted on 1 May 2009.

Having a common case definition means that European countries can collect and report comparable epidemiological data. This gives epidemiologists the information they need to be able to study the pandemic and increase their knowledge about the disease.

ECDC risk assessment

The ECDC risk assessment is a key technical document. It provides background information on the new influenza A(H1N1) virus, concerning transmissibility, severity and risk groups. This document is regularly updated.

Interim ECDC public health guidance

ECDC has produced a series of interim guidance documents on the new influenza A(H1N1) virus, both for the general public and for public health authorities in the Member States.

- **ECDC frequently asked questions** aims at answering the most common questions about the influenza A(H1N1) virus as well as clarifying possible misunderstandings about the disease.
- As the number of confirmed cases reported by European countries continues to grow, ECDC has teamed up with the Commission and its partners in the Member States to provide some clear advice for EU citizens on how they can help to protect themselves and others from becoming infected with the influenza A(H1N1) virus. The **ECDC personal protective measures** are available in all EU languages (plus Norwegian and Icelandic) on the ECDC website.
- Influenza A(H1N1) is being reported from an increasing number of locations all over the world. New areas where this disease is confirmed are identified nearly every day. Therefore, precautionary measures

Key facts:

- ECDC regularly issues a situation report on influenza A(H1N1) that includes the major developments (e.g. number of cases, number of deaths in the EU and worldwide). During May, this report was updated daily.
- ECDC is continuously following the situation in Europe through its various surveillance systems, in close cooperation with the European Commission and the Member States.
- ECDC provides technical and scientific input on influenza A(H1N1) through a number of documents available on a dedicated web page on its website.

for travellers become increasingly important and ECDC has issued **information for travellers**.

ECDC press office

ECDC offers the following services to respond in a timely manner to media queries:

- journalists can contact ECDC through a dedicated hotline and e-mail address;
- a Virtual Press Room with restricted access offers timely information to accredited journalists including a Q&A section with answers to questions posed by journalists on the outbreak of influenza A(H1N1);
- when required, ECDC holds press briefings that are webcasted on its website.

For more information, please refer to:

- ECDC website: www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/Health_topics/novel_influenza_virus/2009_Outbreak/
- Eurosurveillance website: www.eurosurveillance.org
- Commission's website: http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_threats/com/Influenza/novelflu_en.htm



Key facts about the influenza A(H₁N₁) virus

Influenza A(H₁N₁) virus

The present influenza A(H₁N₁) virus is a new virus subtype of influenza affecting humans, which contains segments of genes from pig, bird and human influenza viruses in a combination that has never been observed before anywhere in the world. New viruses are often the result of a re-assortment of genes from two other viruses (swap of genes). This A(H₁N₁) virus is the result of a combination of two swine influenza viruses that already also contained genes of avian and human origin. There is no evidence that this re-assortment occurred in Mexico.

How do people get infected?

People become infected with influenza A(H₁N₁) virus in the same way as for normal seasonal influenza. It spreads from person to person via droplets from an infected person who is coughing or sneezing; it can also spread

indirectly when droplets or secretions from the nose and throat settle on hands and other surfaces which then are touched by other people who touch their own mouth or nose.

Ongoing investigations suggest that the incubation period is from one to seven days. At current, it is believed that this virus has the same properties in terms of spread as seasonal influenza viruses. Based on that, adults who are sick can infect others for approximately five days after symptoms start, and children are infectious for approximately seven days after symptoms start. However, it is prudent to consider someone infectious for the entire time they have symptoms.

Personal protective measures

There is no vaccine available to protect against this new A(H₁N₁) virus. There are everyday actions that can help prevent the spread of germs that cause respiratory illnesses like influenza.

Take these everyday steps to protect your health:

- First and most important: wash your hands. Do not just rinse them quickly under running water – wash thoroughly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If no water is available, an alcohol gel or fluid is also effective.
- Try to stay in good general health. Get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids, and eat nutritious food.
- Try not to touch surfaces that may be contaminated with the flu virus.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth: germs spread this way.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick and avoid crowds and mass gatherings.

For more information, please refer to:

ECDC website: www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/Health_topics/novel_influenza_virus/2009_Outbreak/



Key facts:

- As each day passes, we learn more about the disease and what we should do to prevent it from spreading.
- In the event of a global epidemic, Europe today stands better prepared than ever before.
- As long as there is no vaccine against influenza A(H₁N₁) virus, the first and most important personal protective measure remains: wash your hands!

Symptoms:

From early reports on symptoms, it is clear that they are mostly the same as for 'normal', seasonal influenza, i.e.:

- fever;
- dry cough;
- sore throat;
- body ache;
- headache; and
- chills.

What seems special for the new influenza A(H₁N₁) is that a rather high proportion of patients report vomiting and/or diarrhoea. It also seems to be quite common to have no symptoms at all – several cases were diagnosed by testing of contacts of known cases.

ECDC Executive Science Update is a newsletter published by the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), Stockholm. Any Item may be reproduced for personal use or non-commercial purposes provided the source is acknowledged.

ECDC publishes this bulletin to enhance public access to information about its scientific and technical work. Our goal is to publish accurate information. If errors are brought to our attention, we will try to correct them. However, the ECDC accepts no responsibility or liability whatsoever with regard to the information published in this bulletin.

For free subscriptions, please specify your requirements via e-mail: publications@ecdc.europa.eu

Official publisher : ECDC • Director: Z. Jakab • Editor: Prof. J. Giesecke • Printed in Belgium • ISSN: 1830-7965 • Printed on chlorine-free paper • © European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control

European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC)

Postal address: ECDC, 171 83 Stockholm, Sweden

Visiting address: Tomtebodavägen 11A, Solna, Sweden

Phone +46 (0)8 58 60 1000

Fax +46 (0)8 58 60 1001

www.ecdc.europa.eu

An agency of the European Union

www.europa.eu