

**For information  
On 22 October 2009**

**International Business Committee**

**Latest Situation of Human Swine Influenza in Hong Kong**

**Purpose**

This paper analyses the latest situation of Human Swine Influenza (HSI) in Hong Kong, makes projections about its possible course in the near future, and describes the main tasks ahead in preparation for the coming winter flu season.

**Analysis of latest situation**

2. Since October 2009, HSI activity has slightly decreased as reflected by various surveillance indicators. The number of patients with flu-like symptoms turning up at Designated Flu Clinics (DFC) under the Hospital Authority (HA) as well as private medical practitioners is decreasing. Over 60% of patients attending DFCs for flu-like symptoms are tested positive for HSI. HSI is the dominant type of influenza virus in the community.
3. The number of schools reporting influenza-like illness outbreaks is decreasing as we entered October. Over 50 schools have been suspended for 7 days since September in accordance with the guidelines stipulated by the Department of Health. Nonetheless, the vast majority of illnesses among school children are mild and there has been no fatality in this group so far.
4. The number of serious cases and fatal cases has increased modestly when the activity of HSI was high in recent weeks. Some 70-80% of serious or fatal cases have underlying medical conditions or risk factors.
5. So far the virus has not changed genetically. Resistance to tamiflu (an antiviral drug) has been limited worldwide. Tamiflu is still useful for treating HSI particularly in patients with pre-existing medical conditions and risk factors.

## **Projections**

6. Looking ahead in the next few months, there are three possible projections. In the first projection, HSI activity may peak some time in October (as more people acquire immunity and transmission becomes dampened in schools), decline in November and December (but still above historical baseline), and start picking up again early next year as the winter flu season arrives. In the second projection, high HSI activity is sustained for the rest of 2009 and leads directly to the winter flu season early next year. In the third projection, the winter flu season comes earlier than it normally does (e.g., in December or early January).

## **Next steps**

### *Surveillance*

7. Starting 28 September 2009, HSI is monitored using a combination of surveillance indicators rather than daily reporting of laboratory confirmed cases. The latter is no longer a valid measure of the epidemic situation due to the fact that most infections are mild and not tested. At this stage of the epidemic, weekly updating of HSI surveillance indicators is sufficiently robust to monitor HSI, since daily fluctuations have become inconsequential. The HA also modified its testing strategy at DFC and Accidents & Emergency Departments to conserve laboratory resources for those with genuine medical need for testing

### **HSI vaccination**

8. We are now undergoing the process for the procurement of HSI vaccine. Meanwhile, we are working out the vaccination programme and plan to announce the details in November, with a view to launching the vaccination programme in December.

9. One crucial task is to monitor overseas developments of HSI vaccination programmes, particularly in relation to rare and serious side effects. China, US and some European countries are conducting mass vaccination programmes in the coming two to three months. This will give us valuable information to develop a publicity campaign reassuring the public and healthcare workers about the safety of the vaccine.

## **Other tasks**

10. We will continue to monitor virus characteristics to look for significant changes. Antiviral stockpiles are being replenished, with an additional 2 million doses due to arrive later this year. HA will closely monitor the capacity of its out-patient and in-patient services and review management protocols from time to time. Meanwhile, the Childhood Influenza Vaccination Subsidy Scheme and Elderly Vaccination Subsidy Scheme will be launched on October 19. Eligible children and elders can receive influenza and pneumococcal vaccinations at participating private doctors with subsidy provided by Government. These schemes will help reduce illnesses and complications from influenza with the arrival of the winter flu season.

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