

Wednesday, 3 June, 2009

VICTORIA MOVES TO MODIFIED SUSTAIN PHASE OF FLU PLAN

Victoria will move to a modified Sustain Phase of its influenza plan to protect vulnerable people from the H1N1 virus, Health Minister Daniel Andrews said today.

Announcing that the number of confirmed human swine flu cases in Victoria had increased to 521, Mr Andrews said Victoria would focus its treatment on members of the community most vulnerable to viral infections, such as the elderly, students at special development schools, hospital patients and people with a chronic illness.

Mr Andrews said the decision to move Victoria to a modified Sustain Phase was made on advice from the Australian Health Protection Committee and the Commonwealth's Chief Medical Officer. Other states and territories will remain in the Contain Phase at this stage.

As part of its modified Sustain Phase response, Victoria will:

- Give antiviral treatment to those people exhibiting the agreed clinical case definition of human swine flu, together with their immediate household contacts;
- Require confirmed cases to isolate themselves for three days following the commencement of antiviral treatment, but household contacts will not be required to be quarantined;
- Maintain intensive contact tracing in high risk settings like aged care facilities, hospitals and special schools to protect those at greater risk of severe complications from human swine flu; and
- Implement enhanced community-wide surveillance of influenza-like illness and undertake increased sampling to monitor the distribution of the virus and any changes in the dominant circulating influenza strain.

"With this decision to move to the modified Sustain Phase of the plan, Victoria will continue to provide treatment to people who have been confirmed with the H1N1 virus, and preventative treatment to their direct household members," Mr Andrews said.

Students with flu-like illness would still go into home quarantine for three days, but schools would no longer be automatically closed if there were confirmed cases across several classes.

"The decision to move to a modified sustain phase of our plan acknowledges that Victoria's response to the H1N1 influenza virus is proportionate to the risk to the community," Mr Andrews said.

Victoria's Acting Chief Health Officer Dr Rosemary Lester said the virus continued to be relatively mild in its impact, with the majority of cases being young people aged between five and 18.

"Young, healthy students are more robust. While having the flu is still not a pleasant experience, our move to a modified Sustain Phase acknowledges our younger members of the community are strong and healthy enough to bounce back without too much impact," Dr Lester said.

"This will enable us to give priority to the more vulnerable members of the community."

Dr Lester said the best way to limit the spread of all influenza viruses was to be aware of the need for good personal hygiene, such as covering your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough and sneeze, and washing your hands often with soap and water.

“In a typical year, up to one million Australians will contract the normal winter flu,” Dr Lester said.

“This is why the Government protects people at high risk with the influenza immunisation program, and why moving to the next stage of our plan will enable Victoria to concentrate its efforts on this group.”

Dr Lester said Victoria confirmed another 126 more cases of H1N1 influenza overnight, increasing the state’s total to 521.

“There is little or no immunity in the population when a new viral strain such as H1N1 influenza appears, and while this means that we expect a higher proportion of the population to be affected, it does not mean the virus is necessarily more severe,” Dr Lester said.

“Planning and preparedness are the best way to mitigate the potentially serious consequences of an influenza pandemic, and in Victoria we have responded quickly in accordance with our plan.”

Dr Lester said people with influenza-like symptoms should present to their doctor for the best possible advice.

“It’s always wise to call ahead and alert clinic staff to your arrival so the proper arrangements can be made,” Dr Lester said.

Health advice:

- **Personal hygiene remains vital. We should all follow flu season hygiene procedures, such as regular hand washing, covering nose and mouth if sneezing and coughing, and staying at home if sick.**
- **Follow any instructions by health professionals on quarantining or limiting social contact;**
- **People who feel ill with influenza-like symptoms should present to their doctor for the best possible advice. It is always wise to call ahead, or to alert the clinic staff when you arrive.**

For the most up-to-date information:

- **Visit www.health.vic.gov.au;**
- **Call the Influenza Hotline on 180 2007 or call Nurse-on-Call on 1300 60 60 24 for expert health information and advice (freecall 24 hours, 7 days).**

FACTS ON VICTORIA'S H1N1 INFLUENZA CASES

Home addresses of confirmed cases:

<u>LGA</u>	<u>Cases</u>
Greater Geelong (C)	2
<u>Total Barwon South Western Region</u>	<u>2</u>

Boroondara (C)	20
Knox (C)	9
Manningham (C)	6
Maroondah (C)	2
Monash (C)	8
Whitehorse (C)	10
Yarra Ranges (S)	3
<u>Total Eastern Metropolitan Region</u>	<u>58</u>

East Gippsland (S)	1
<u>Total Gippsland Region</u>	<u>1</u>

Indigo (S)	2
Mitchell (S)	2
Murrindindi (S)	1
<u>Total Hume Region (NE Victoria)</u>	<u>5</u>

Central Goldfields (S)	1
Macedon Ranges (S)	7
Mount Alexander (S)	1
<u>Total Loddon Mallee Region</u>	<u>9</u>

Banyule (C)	13
Brimbank (C)	40
Darebin (C)	36
Hobsons Bay (C)	8
Hume (C)	67
Maribyrnong (C)	10
Melbourne (C)	10
Melton (S)	21
Moonee Valley (C)	14
Moreland (C)	34
Nillumbik (S)	4
Whittlesea (C)	74
Wyndham (C)	39
Yarra (C)	17
<u>Total North & West Metro Region</u>	<u>387</u>

Bayside (C)	9
Casey (C)	6
Frankston (C)	1
Glen Eira (C)	5
Greater Dandenong (C)	9
Kingston (C)	13
Mornington Peninsula (S)	3
Stonnington (C)	7
<u>Total Southern Metro Region</u>	<u>53</u>

To be confirmed	6
<u>TOTAL VICTORIA</u>	<u>521</u>

Females	231	44% of total
Males	283	54% of total
Not stated	7	

Media contact: www.premier.vic.gov.au