

## **Nettleham Medical Practice Swine Flu Information - 6th July 2009**

You may have heard on the news last week that the Government has changed the management approach of Swine Flu from containment to treatment. This leaflet is to update you on the current situation and to explain what action you should take if you think you may have developed Swine Flu.

### **Why has the Government's guidance changed?**

Until last week the Department of Health and Public Health organisations within the UK were working to 'contain' Swine Flu - that is, to try to prevent it spreading into the general population. For this reason anyone with symptoms of Swine Flu was swabbed in order to be properly diagnosed. If the swabs were positive then the patient and all of their close contacts were treated with antiviral medication in order to try to reduce the length of their illness and the risk of them spreading it to other people. Recent monitoring, however, has shown that Swine Flu cases are now appearing in the general population, without people necessarily having been abroad to high-risk areas or having been in contact with other people with Swine Flu, and so it is thought that it is not possible to try to contain the illness. The Government has therefore decided that we should change the approach we take. From now on, anyone with symptoms of Swine Flu will be assessed by a healthcare professional and then treated if it is thought to be appropriate. The decision to treat or not will now be a clinical judgement rather than based on swab results. In addition we will no longer be routinely treating the close contacts of patients thought to have Swine Flu.

### **How worried do I need to be about Swine Flu?**

The simple answer is that we don't really know yet. To date most cases of Swine Flu have been relatively mild and people have recovered without any lasting effects. There have been some deaths in the UK and these have obviously received a lot of attention in the media which can be frightening. However, there have so far been very few cases of Swine Flu in Lincolnshire and there has been a lot of work done by the Primary Care Trust to ensure that we are as prepared as possible for any eventuality.

Previous experience of flu pandemics tells us that there is usually an initial phase with few cases followed by a bigger peak of cases a few months later. While we hope that the Swine Flu infection will remain mild it is sensible to prepare for the worst case scenario especially as we go into the winter where we can expect a usual seasonal flu outbreak.

### **What are the symptoms of Swine Flu?**

It is very difficult to tell the difference between Swine Flu and other common illnesses such as the common cold. We are aware that there have been a lot of colds circulating recently and this can be confusing for patients.

The symptoms we are concerned about are:

A high temperature >38 C

PLUS

at least two of: cough, sore throat, runny nose, generalised aches and pains, headache, diarrhoea, vomiting

OR

non-specifically unwell but with a high temperature

## **What should I do if I think I have these symptoms?**

The first thing we ask is that if you have these symptoms please DO NOT come to the surgery. We will, of course, be happy to look after you but in order to prevent you spreading the infection to other patients the initial assessment will be done by telephone. Until it is determined whether you need treatment for Swine Flu the advice is to stay at home.

If you develop symptoms then you can telephone the surgery in the usual way on 01522 751717. Tell the receptionist that you have flu-like symptoms and you will be given a time for a telephone consultation on the same day. In addition, the receptionist may ask for some details of your symptoms and whether you have any pre-existing medical problems.

Alternatively you can access help from NHS Direct on 0845 46 47 where they will perform a telephone assessment, or you can look on the NHS Choices website where they have an online Symptom Checker - [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk). In a few weeks' time there will be a designated flu helpline which will also provide assessments - we will let you know the number for this when it is up and running.

Please note that if you contact either of these sources of advice but you are in an 'at risk' group (see below) you will be told to contact us at the surgery for further assessment and advice.

## **Who are considered to be 'at risk' patients?**

Anyone under the age of 5 or over 65.

Pregnant women.

Those of any age with the following medical conditions:  
chronic disease affecting the heart, kidneys, lungs\*, liver or nervous system  
diabetes  
immunosuppression

\*this includes even mild asthmatics if you have had any treatment for asthma in the last 3 years

If you are in any of these groups then it is important that treatment for Swine Flu is started as soon as possible after your symptoms start, and certainly within 48 hours.

## **What if I need medication?**

There are two types of treatment available for Swine Flu and the Government has a good stockpile of each - one is tablets and the other is an inhaler. Which you will receive depends on whether you have any particular pre-existing condition and will be determined during your assessment. In each case the treatment will be for five days.

If we decide that you need some treatment then it will not be provided in the usual way - what happens will depend on whether you speak to us at the surgery or have been diagnosed by NHS Direct. In each case you will need to have a 'Flu Friend' to collect your treatment for you - this can be a member of your family or a friend or neighbour. It is important, however (to prevent spread of infection) that you DO NOT collect the treatment yourself.

If you have been assessed by one of us from the surgery then we will arrange for an 'Authorisation Voucher' to be completed for you. This can then be collected from the surgery by your Flu Friend who can take it to a local Antiviral Collection Point and will

be given your medication.

If you have been assessed by NHS Direct (or the flu helpline when it is up and running) then they will tell you your Unique Patient Reference Number. It is important that you write this down as your Flu Friend will need to know this when they go to the Antiviral Collection Point to collect your medication.

In addition to the antiviral medication (if prescribed), the usual treatments for viral illnesses can help you to feel better. This includes taking regular paracetamol (up to four times daily) or ibuprofen (up to three times daily), drinking plenty of fluids and getting lots of rest.

### **What does my Flu Friend need to take to collect my treatment?**

Your Authorisation Voucher or Unique Patient Reference Number

Some photo ID for themselves

AND

Some ID for you (the patient)

### **What if I do not have anyone to collect my medication for me?**

If this is the case then you should tell whoever carries out your assessment - we are informed by the PCT that there are arrangements in place to get medication to anyone without a Flu Friend. There may be a delay in this situation, however, so it is a good idea to start thinking about who could be your Flu Friend if necessary. Please DO NOT go to the antiviral collection point yourself as we are trying to prevent the spread of the infection.

### **Will my family need to be treated?**

Generally speaking we are no longer treating asymptomatic people just because they are close contacts of people with Swine Flu. If you are uncertain whether a member of your household needs treatment then please ask during your assessment.

### **Is there a vaccine for Swine Flu?**

We are told that a vaccine for the Swine Flu virus is currently being made and that the Government has placed large orders with the manufacturer. We hope that the first delivery of the vaccine will arrive in late August but we are not yet certain who will be vaccinated first. When we have any more information about this then we will, of course, inform you if it is recommended that you have a vaccination and what you need to do to receive one.

### **What else can I do to avoid catching Swine Flu?**

General hygiene can help to reduce transmission of all viruses, including the Swine Flu virus. This includes:

Covering your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing, using a tissue when possible.

Disposing of dirty tissues promptly and carefully

Maintaining good basic hygiene, for example washing hands frequently with soap and water to reduce the spread of the virus from your hands to your face or to other people

Cleaning hard surfaces (such as door handles) frequently using a normal cleaning product.

## **What about everyday medical needs?**

Currently there are no changes planned to the usual care we provide. However, in the future, depending on how many patients are affected, we may need to change how we run the surgery. If there is a widespread outbreak (probably over the winter) then we may have members of staff off sick as well as having to deal with a lot of patients with the flu. This means that we may have to withdraw some 'non-essential' services and that you may not be able to see your first choice of doctor or nurse. Please bear with us if this is the case - the situation is changing almost daily and the advice we receive changes as well. We are currently working closely with Welton Surgery to make sure that we will still be able to take care of you even in the most severe situation. There may be some problems with routine services at the local hospitals as well. We will keep you informed of developments as regularly as we are able.

## **Where else can I get information?**

If you have any further questions then you can get more information from the following sources:

0800 1 513 513 (National Swine Flu Information Line)  
0845 46 47 (NHS Direct)

[www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk) (NHS Choices)  
[www.hpa.org.uk](http://www.hpa.org.uk) (Health Protection Agency)  
[www.dh.gov.uk](http://www.dh.gov.uk) (Department of Health)

[www.nettlehammedical.co.uk](http://www.nettlehammedical.co.uk)