INFORMATION FROM SA HEALTH

Current situation - change to ‘Protect’ phase
The growth in confirmed cases across the country (and across the world) is evidence that it’s no longer possible to contain the virus in any particular geographic area.

SA Health has been watching the virus closely since it first emerged back in April. Evidence from overseas so far shows that ‘swine flu’ is not significantly worse than seasonal flu. In most cases it is a mild illness. That’s why we’re moving into the “Protect” phase.

Vulnerable people
In the Protect phase, we will focus on treating this as a ‘seasonal flu for which we have no vaccine’.

Some people are more vulnerable to serious complications from getting flu. With seasonal flu, we would protect these vulnerable people with a vaccine. With ‘swine flu’, we can’t protect them with a vaccine yet, so we will be focusing on protecting them with antiviral medication until there is a vaccine. These vulnerable people include:

- People with chronic diseases, eg lung, heart or kidney disease, diabetes or people whose immune systems are suppressed by illness of medication
- People with asthma
- Pregnant women
- Morbidly obese people

People in these groups who become very ill with flu-like symptoms will be given antivirals free of charge. We also advise these vulnerable people to do everything they can to keep well and avoid close contact with anyone showing signs of illness.

People who are not in the vulnerable group
The vast majority of people in Australia who’ve had ‘swine flu’ have only had mild symptoms and have fully recovered in a few days.

People who aren’t in that vulnerable group and who are only showing mild signs of the illness will be asked to stay at home and look after themselves in the same way they would if they had seasonal flu. They won’t be given antivirals free of charge but should speak to their GP if they start to feel worse.

GPs will continue to play that frontline role in making medical decisions about who needs antivirals. They will assess the clinical conditions of their patients and decide whether to prescribe antivirals for supply by prescription which the patient will have to pay for.

School closures
School or class closures are no longer recommended as an effective way of stopping the spread of the virus now that it is more widespread in the community. We are asking parents to keep their children home if they are sick and keep them there until they are well.

We won’t be asking students to stay at home if they have travelled to high prevalence areas unless they are showing symptoms of flu-like illness.

Each person’s situation will be assessed on a case by case basis in consultation with their doctor as for any other illness.

For more information on schools, please visit our ‘Information for Schools’ page.

Home isolation
People with mild disease will be advised to stay at home until they are well, and over the counter medication such as paracetamol will be recommended to treat the symptoms of their illness.

People who have been in contact with anyone who has confirmed or suspected ‘swine flu’ will no longer be asked to stay in home isolation unless they themselves start to show flu-like symptoms.