



THE HON NICOLA ROXON MP
Minister for Health and Ageing

MEDIA RELEASE

1.30pm, 27 April 2009

AUSTRALIA STRENGTHENS BORDER SURVEILLANCE FOR SWINE FLU

On the advice of the Commonwealth Chief Medical Officer, Professor Jim Bishop, the Australian government has today strengthened border surveillance measures at airports in response to the potential spread of Swine Flu.

Before all planes are permitted to land in Australia from the Americas the Captain will be required from midnight tonight to report to the Australian Quarantine Inspection Service (AQIS) on the health status of passengers on the plane. If there is any person on the plane who is considered to have flu like symptoms they will be seen by an AQIS officer who will assess if medical attention is required.

In addition, an onboard announcement will be made by crew on all flights coming into Australia before landing to inform passengers that if they feel unwell with flu symptoms they should ensure they seek immediate medical attention.

Professor Bishop has authorised the new measures in an effort to ensure that people entering Australia are identified if they have influenza and that those people who may later develop symptoms have information on what they should do.

In addition to strengthened border surveillance measures, the Government is also:

- Establishing a hotline for anyone with questions about the influenza outbreak.
- Other Australian Government hotlines are being updated with information on the influenza situation
- Updating travel advisories as events develop. These can be accessed at www.smartraveller.gov.au, 1300 555 135 or for overseas consular assistance +61 2 6261 3305
- The Department of Health and Ageing website (www.health.gov.au) will also be updated as events develop

Information has also been provided to emergency departments, border agency staff and front line health workers, to give them factual information on the outbreaks and to alert them to the known characteristics and risk factors for this disease. Similar information has been sent from the Chief Medical Officer to General Practitioners.

From last Friday when the Swine Flu issue became known, the Department of Health and Ageing has been actively monitoring the recent human cases of swine influenza in the USA, and outbreaks of severe respiratory illness affecting Mexico.

Although it is clear that these outbreaks are caused by a new virus, it is not clear as yet that these outbreaks suggest the emergence of a pandemic. The World Health Organization has declared that this situation represents a public health emergency of international concern. It has not, however, changed the pandemic phase to a higher level of alert.

The Australian Government is continuing to review the public health response to these events and is ready to escalate the level of response as required.

The Department of Health and Ageing, with advice from the Australian Health Protection Committee (AHPC), is carefully monitoring unfolding events. The AHPC will be convened regularly to review and adjust Australia's public health response as appropriate. Anyone who has returned recently from Mexico or the South-western states of the USA with influenza-like symptoms since March this year should seek advice from their GP.

For media inquiries telephone the Minister's office on 02 6277 7220