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MEDIA RELEASE

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New Pandemic Phase *PROTECT*

Today the Australian Government has announced a new response phase to manage the outbreak of H1N1 Influenza 09 called PROTECT.

On the advice of the Chief Medical Officer, Professor Jim Bishop, and in consultation with State and Territory governments, this new pandemic phase has been created to guide the ongoing Australian response to the disease.

The new phase recognises that the infection with H1N1 Influenza 09 is not as severe as originally envisaged when the Australian Health Management Plan for Pandemic Influenza (AHMPPI) was written in 2008 and that this new disease is mild in most cases, severe in some and moderate overall.

PROTECT sits alongside CONTAIN and SUSTAIN phases with a greater focus on the vulnerable or people in whom the disease may be severe.

PROTECT is a measured, reasonable and proportionate health response to the risk that the virus poses to the Australian community. It is consistent with the message from the WHO when it lifted its Pandemic Alert to 6, that countries will need to adjust their responses to accommodate the knowledge we now have that this disease is moderate in most cases.

Key elements of the new Phase of PROTECT are:

- Identification and early treatment of those with moderate or severe disease especially in people with respiratory difficulty.
- A focus on early treatment of people who may be vulnerable to severe outcomes. These people include pregnant women and those with respiratory disease (asthma, COAD), heart disease, diabetes, renal disease, morbid obesity, and immunosuppression.
- Control of outbreaks in institutional settings, such as special schools.
- Widespread school closures or school exclusion for students who have travelled to areas of high prevalence are no longer appropriate and will not be continued on a national basis.
- Voluntary home isolation for those with mild disease with supportive treatment only, such as over the counter medication.

- Antivirals from the national or state medical stockpiles will be provided to those people with moderate or severe disease or whose underlying conditions, after appropriate clinical assessment, could make them vulnerable to severe infection. It is not appropriate to provide antivirals to their otherwise healthy household contacts, nor will those contacts be placed into quarantine.
- Testing would focus on to identification of H1N1 Influenza 09 in people with moderate or severe illness, people more vulnerable to severe illness, those in institutional settings and Indigenous Australians.
- Increased identification and monitoring of H1N1 hospital admissions, ICU admissions and levels of morbidity and monitoring of clinical outcomes throughout the influenza season.
- Increased sentinel testing to identify levels of community transmission and the strain of circulating influenza viruses.
- Ongoing monitoring of the virus for the emergence of antiviral resistance, genomic drift or reassortment that could herald a change to greater virulence.
- Additional border measures such as thermal screening and Health Declaration Cards will cease.

Under the PROTECT response, pathology testing of all potential cases will not be required or desirable. This is because most cases are mild and do not require treatment and confirmation is no longer required to inform clinical decisions about quarantine or use of antivirals.

Vulnerable people would be diagnosed and treated according to clinical judgement.

Jurisdictions will be making arrangements progressively over the next few days to move to this new level and we anticipate that all states will be at this level by next Friday 26 June.

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