



MEDIA RELEASE

Minister for Health and Ageing

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Preparing for an influenza pandemic - the plan

The Commonwealth Government today released the Interim Australian Management Plan for Pandemic Influenza, which is a detailed national action plan to guide Australia's response to any global outbreak.

The World Health Organization, which has been carefully monitoring the spread of bird flu in Asia, says that the world is closer than it's ever been to a new pandemic outbreak. It has been calling on all governments to develop or refine pandemic plans.

It is estimated that a major influenza pandemic could lead to 2.6 million Australians seeking medical attention, 58,000 needing hospitalisation and 13,000 deaths. This would place enormous pressure on all emergency and specialist services. Hospital, ambulance and all other health care services would be stretched to capacity – as would state emergency services.

The government is taking this threat seriously. The National Influenza Pandemic Action Committee (NIPAC), chaired by the Chief Medical Officer, Professor John Horvath, has consulted widely to produce this latest pandemic plan. The Health Department will be holding further consultations ahead of the next version, planned for the second half of this year.

The plan, primarily for the health profession and state and territory authorities, will be of interest to the wider community as well as it describes the actions that may need to be taken in Australia if a pandemic flu breaks out.

Australia is one of the most prepared countries in the world for coping with an influenza pandemic. The Commonwealth Government has provided funding of \$156.8 million over five years to protect Australians from potential outbreaks of human pandemic influenza and from the entry of bird flu into the country.

Australia has acquired one of world's largest stockpiles (on a per capita basis) of antiviral treatments for influenza. In the 2005-06 Federal Budget, the government provided \$23.2 million to establish an independent World Health Organization Collaborating Centre on influenza.

The government also has a binding agreement with two of the largest vaccine manufacturers in the world to provide guaranteed supplies of any newly developed vaccine against pandemic influenza. The nation's infectious diseases surveillance system has been upgraded using money from the 2004-05 Budget. This will enable rapid detection and reporting of infectious diseases of public health significance, such as bird flu in humans.

This new plan is an important landmark in ensuring Australia is as well prepared as possible in the face of this uncertainty.

For a copy of the plan (and more comprehensive information on influenza pandemic) go to www.health.gov.au
[direct link: http://wcmprd01.act.health.gov.au/internet/wcms/publishing.nsf/Content/health-avian_influenza-index.htm.]

For further information phone free call 1800 004 599.

Tony Abbott recently outlined the government's pandemic preparedness in a speech at an infectious diseases conference. It can be read at -
<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/wcms/publishing.nsf/Content/health-mediarel-yr2005-ta-abbsp020505.htm>

For more information call Mr Abbott's office on ph 02 6277 7220.