

WASH



INFORM



STAY APART



ETIQUETTE



FLU-WISE

CARE



FLU-CARE

ASSESS



REST



EVALUATE



WHO/UNICEF

Informal discussion on behavioural interventions for the next influenza pandemic

12-14 December 2006, Bangkok

Summary and recommendations

Background

An influenza pandemic is a rare but recurrent event. A pandemic occurs when a new influenza virus emerges and starts spreading as easily as normal influenza – by coughing and sneezing. Because the virus is new, the human immune system will have no pre-existing immunity. This makes it likely that people who contract pandemic influenza will experience more serious disease than that caused by normal influenza.

Once a fully contagious virus emerges, its global spread is considered inevitable. Countries might, through measures such as border closures and travel restrictions, delay arrival of the virus, but cannot stop it. The pandemics of the previous century encircled the globe in 6 to 9 months, even when most international travel was by ship. Given the speed and volume of international air travel today, the virus could spread more rapidly, possibly reaching all continents in less than 3 months.

Current projections for the next pandemic estimate that a substantial percentage of the world's population will require some form of medical care. Few countries have the staff, facilities, equipment, and hospital beds needed to cope with large numbers of people who suddenly fall ill. Supplies of vaccines and antiviral drugs – the two most important medical interventions for reducing illness and deaths during a pandemic – will be inadequate in all countries and vaccines will probably not be available for six months after the start of a pandemic.

Subsequently, pandemic preparedness has become more significant to enable citizens to take appropriate action to protect themselves and their families, before, during and after a pandemic in order to reduce transmission and minimize morbidity, mortality, and social and economic disruption.

National authorities are responsible for developing appropriate public health policies and communication strategies and these will vary significantly depending on the national context - the framework proposed here is a guide to be adapted to local realities, as needed.

Method

An Informal Discussion was held between UNICEF and WHO in December 2006, in response to requests to guide national level planning. Participants reviewed the lessons learnt from past pandemics as well as the current available evidence in order to propose a set of core behaviours that could mitigate the impact of the next influenza pandemic.

The Informal Discussion recognized that communication is vital to help families prepare by informing them on how to protect themselves and their communities. Appropriate and timely communication that addresses the fears and concerns of populations can help reduce anxiety, and complacency that may lead to higher mortality and/or socioeconomic disruption because people panic and/or take inappropriate actions. But, there are many challenges:

- The timing and severity of the next pandemic are unknowable;
- There are still important gaps in our knowledge about the spread of influenza, and hence the impact of control measure such as masks that do not have solid evidence base;
- The new virus that emerges may have novel features;
- The uncertainties and the pandemic's unpredictable impacts on the complex, globally interconnected, and 'just-in-time' stock management of the world today make planning difficult.

Summary

This meeting proposed key behaviours to mitigate the impact of the next pandemic based on some explicit assumptions, which may need to be changed in the light of new knowledge. Even extreme individual behaviours may not provide 100% protection (except total isolation), but it was viewed that collective action could potentially make a difference. The challenge was to find a set of minimally disruptive behaviours that:

- Could have an impact in reducing the transmission of pandemic influenza;
- Could improve the chances of survival during a pandemic; as well as
- Promote a sense of “agency” and ability to take action during a potentially frightening situation.

An overall priority is for people to comply with public health messages and this requires building trust in those who provide public health information. It means that national authorities should begin to engage with the public to prepare NOW for the possible actions that could be taken to contain the first sign of new pandemic strain through rapid containment, as well as the possible implications of what will happen during a pandemic.

The behaviours to be promoted will change as the pandemic evolves, and the announcement of key events provides valuable opportunities to reinforce key messages as part of a communication strategy.

Core priority behaviours

- **Prepare now** by being aware how to prevent and treat pandemic influenza, develop good health habits and get a family health kit (that includes thermometer, anti-pyretic, spare supplies 1 month’s essential medication and contraceptives) and essential supplies. Seek care for fever and severe respiratory symptoms to enable the early diagnosis of a newly emerging virus.

- **To reduce transmission follow Flu-WISE behaviours from now and during the pandemic:**

Wash: wash hands often, clean and disinfect surfaces.

Inform yourself and others about influenza and maintain good health habits.

Stay apart: Keep a distance of more than one metre away from others, especially if sick. Stay at home as much as possible; avoid public gatherings, avoid travel.*

Etiquette: Cover coughs and sneezes (mask, tissue or elbow, but not hands); don’t spit in public.

- **To reduce mortality follow Flu-CARE behaviours during the pandemic:**

Care for the patient at home;

Assess and improve your knowledge on how to care for yourself and others;

Rest as soon as symptoms develop, seek health advice, and stay home;

Evaluate for danger signs and act in accordance with latest information.

**Behaviours needed only in a pandemic, but people need to be prepared now and plan for this.*

Assumptions about the pandemic

The timing and severity of the next pandemic are unknowable. Furthermore there are still important gaps in our knowledge about the spread of influenza, and hence the impact of control measures. In addition, the new virus that emerges may have novel features.

Assumptions about the virus and its transmission

- The severity of the effects of the virus that emerges and other key epidemiological parameters will not be known for a month or so after the virus emerges; the effects could be mild or severe but public concern will be high.
- Outside the health care setting, nearly all infections will be spread by infected respiratory droplets (spread directly or via a hand touching an infected surface and then touching the eyes/mouth/nose).
- Keeping at least 1m distance from an infected person will protect against direct droplet spread (except if sneezed or coughed at).
- Washing hands with water and soap will remove/kill influenza virus on the hands.
- An infected person (especially a child) may be infectious before symptom onset, and are most infectious when coughing and sneezing starts; they are no longer infectious once recovered.

Assumptions about behaviours

- Achieving high levels of compliance to public health advice will be a major challenge.
- In a crisis, individuals will focus mostly on their own individual needs and those of their immediate family. However, the summation of individual behaviours, or ‘collective action’ will be most effective in limiting transmission of the virus to individuals (i.e. providing a ‘herd effect’)
- There will be variable perceptions of the risk, ranging from fear driving some inappropriate response to low risk perception driving others.
- Individuals/communities have the means to appropriately practice the key behaviours.
- Peer pressure and social norms result in widespread adoption of new behaviours.

Assumptions about health services and access to commodities

- Health services will be overstretched during a pandemic and functioning sub-optimally due to a surge in illness and a decrease in the number of health care workers who are working as well as sub-optimal working conditions in health care facilities
- Countries will have variable access to antivirals and pandemic vaccine in terms of amount and timing.

Flu-WISE: Key behavioural interventions for reducing risk of transmission during pandemic influenza

Rationale

- Hand hygiene is an important measure to prevent the spread of influenza as well as other infections. Washing with soap removes and kills germs.
- Hands should be cleaned by washing with soap and water or by using sanitising lotions or wipes
- Surfaces can become contaminated and touching infected surfaces can transmit the virus. Disinfecting surfaces will remove and kill the virus

Wash hands often

Clean and disinfect surfaces



WASH

Constraints

- Cultural practices and perceptions related to hand washing and hygiene
- Connection between hygiene and respiratory illness not obvious
- Frequency and timing of hand washing.

Enabling factors

- Availability and accessibility of clean, running water and soap in households and public places
- Availability and accessibility of cleaning materials such as disinfectant
- Regulation and enforcement in public places and institutions

Inform yourselves and others about influenza and maintain good health habits

- Maintaining good health habits before a pandemic occurs will mean it will be easier to continue and maintain these habits during a pandemic
- Promoting information exchange within different community settings before a pandemic, supports social cohesion and support during a pandemic

- Ability to integrate knowledge into behaviours
- Trust in the sources of information
- Self-interest (for informing others)

- Wide-scale public awareness and promotion of appropriate behaviours before a pandemic
- Public trust in the efficacy of these behaviours
- Social and community cohesion

2



INFORM

Keep a distance of more than one metre away from others, especially if sick

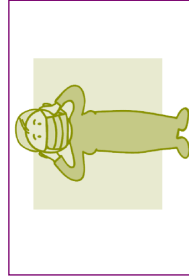
Stay at home as much as possible; avoid public gatherings, avoid travel

- The virus is spread by close contact with a person with respiratory symptoms (generally within 1 metre)
- The infection can spread easily in places where there are many people in close contact
- The more people in contact - the increase risks of becoming infected
- Children, elderly, pregnant women or those who have chronic illnesses may get sick more easily and special consideration should be given to ensure they do not come into contact with sick people

- Counter-intuitive (need for human contact, closeness)
- Feasibility in crowded households
- Feasibility re: public transport
- Feasibility in high population densities

- Altruism (protecting others from getting infected)
- Availability and access of essential services to enable people to stay at home
- The ability to take care of sick family members away from healthy family members
- The ability to work from home and still continue to earn a livelihood

3



STAY APART

(during a pandemic)

Cover coughs and sneezes (use tissue or elbow)

Don't spit in public

If using masks or scarves, dispose or wash them safely

- When people cough, droplets containing viruses are sprayed into the air. Covering the mouth and nose with a mask, scarf or piece of cloth when in close contact with others can limit the spread of respiratory disease
- Hands, unless washed immediately afterwards, easily spreads germs

- Cultural norms and practices
- Perceptions of risk related to etiquette



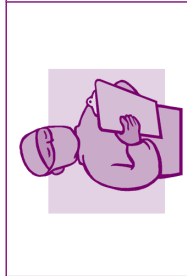
- Wide-scale public awareness and promotion of appropriate behaviours before a pandemic
- Public trust in the efficacy of these behaviours
- Social/civic responsibility to ensure the safety of others

4



ETIQUETTE

Flu-CARE: Key behavioural interventions for reducing mortality and surviving pandemic influenza

	Rationale	Constraints	Enabling factors	
1	 <p>Care for the patient at home</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Health services will be overwhelmed with the number of sick people and will be unable to cope with demand Anti-virals may not be available Using as fewer care givers as possible will minimize the exposure of other family members to the virus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fear of becoming infected Lack of knowledge on how to care for the sick at home Lack of access to essential supplies such as food and medicines More than one member of household becoming sick 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Availability and access of essential services to enable people to stay at home Availability and access of essential medicines such as analgesics, fluids and food The ability to take care of sick family members away from healthy family members Those who have already been exposed to the virus and have recovered are unlikely to become re-infected and can support others
2	 <p>Assess and improve your knowledge on how to care for yourself and others</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knowing how to care for sick people at home may increase their chances of survival Knowing how to care for sick people at home may reduce the onset of severe complications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of appropriate information Inability to access existing sources of information (e.g. rural and remote areas) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wide-scale public awareness and promotion of appropriate behaviours before a pandemic Public trust in the efficacy of care-taking behaviours Access to timely and appropriate information during the pandemic Those who have already been exposed to the virus and have recovered are unlikely to become re-infected and can support others
3	 <p>Rest as soon as symptoms develop, seek health advice, and stay home</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rest will improve the chances of sick people with any kind of infection to recover 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Denial that one is sick Competing priorities (work/family) Fear of losing employment and income Guilt of staying at home 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Availability and access of essential services to enable people to stay at home Availability and access of essential medicines such as analgesics, fluids and food The ability to take care of sick family members away from healthy family members Those who have already been exposed to the virus and have recovered are unlikely to become re-infected and can support others
4	 <p>Evaluate for danger signs and act in accordance with latest information</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Severe complications need to be treated by appropriate health personnel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of knowledge of danger signs Panic, fear, sense of helplessness Exhaustion of care-takers Social breakdown Restrictions on mobility e.g. transport 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wide-scale public awareness and promotion of appropriate information before a pandemic Reinforcement of appropriate information during a pandemic Access to appropriate health care to patients with severe complications Promoting volunteerism and community support to promote social cohesion and recovery