

Press Release - 09 October 2009

PR 59
For Immediate Release

Register with GP in preparation for swine flu

People in eastern and coastal Kent are being urged to make sure they are registered with a GP so they can get a swine flu vaccination if they are part of the priority groups.

This call comes after news that the expected growth in new cases of swine flu is proving to be slower than predicted.

The number of people contacting their GP with swine flu-like symptoms across eastern and coastal Kent last week has increased to 28.3 per 100,000 population compared to 16.5 per 100,000 the week before. In England the rate is 28.5 per 100,000. These rates are below seasonal activity.

The two vaccinations being used in the UK have now been licensed and GPs should start immunising within the next month.

Only people who are registered with a GP will be offered immunisation which will be focused so that protection is offered to those who most need it. People with underlying health conditions, such as heart disease and diabetes, and pregnant women will be among a 14 million-strong nationwide priority group which will get the vaccine first along with health workers.

By being able to start the vaccination programme before a sharp rise in new infections, NHS Eastern and Coastal Kent's Deputy Director of Public Health Andrew Scott-Clark believes many lives could be saved.

He said: "Progress of the second wave of pandemic flu is proving to be slower than predicted. We may have got a lucky break with the way the virus has behaved giving us the opportunity to get the vaccinations underway."

The best way people can continue to protect themselves is by following good hygiene - catch coughs or sneezes in a tissue and bin tissues as soon as possible. Simply remember: Catch It, Bin It, Kill It.

He added: "People should prepare themselves by stocking up on over-the-counter remedies and by identifying a flu friend - someone who does not have swine flu - who can pick up their antivirals and any other supplies for them should they become ill."

Anyone suspecting they have swine flu can check their symptoms on the National Pandemic Flu Service website www.direct.gov.uk/pandemicflu or call 0800 1 513 100 or 0800 1 513 200. They should not visit their GP.

Once people are confirmed with swine flu by the National Pandemic Flu Service, they will be given a unique authorisation number that the 'flu friend' can use to pick up the antivirals from a local antiviral collection point.

Callers to the service will be told where their nearest antiviral collection point is.

However, people with swine flu symptoms should only contact their doctor direct rather than using the National Pandemic Flu Service if they:

- * Have a serious underlying illness
- * Are pregnant
- * Have a sick child under one year old
- * Realise their condition is suddenly getting much worse
- * Think their condition is still getting worse after seven days (five for a child).

Ends

For more details contact Christine King on 01227 795089 or christine.king@eastcoastkent.nhs.uk



NHS Eastern and Coastal Kent works closely with the public and patients to identify the health needs of its 710,000 population and buy appropriate healthcare. It pursues perfection in the safety and quality of clinical services across Thanet, Dover, Shepway, Ashford, Canterbury and Swale.

Our new and improved *Your Health* magazine is just one way in which we keep the public informed of changes to the health service. You can read the latest edition at www.easternandcoastalkent.nhs.uk/yourhealth