

# Media Briefing



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For Immediate Release

## Swine flu media briefing

1. The key message we would like to stress today is that people who think they may have swine flu should contact health services from home.
2. The vast majority of swine flu cases are not severe and people recover very well from them.
3. Most of the serious complications so far have been in people who've had an underlying illness of some sort.
4. As we see more cases overall, the small proportion of people who develop serious complications and sadly sometimes die will start to become much more visible.
5. But it's worth making absolutely clear that with this virus so far we're seeing the majority of people having a relatively mild illness from which they recover quickly.
6. Earlier this month, Cumbria announced its first laboratory confirmed case of the virus - a visitor to the Carlisle area. At around the same time the Department of Health announced the NHS was moving to treating and no longer containing the swine flu virus.
7. As little was known about the new virus when the outbreak started back in April, it was sensible to take all possible measures to slow its spread while we learned more.
8. For example swabbing patients suspected of having swine flu to confirm the diagnosis, offering them antivirals to relieve symptoms and tracing their close contacts to offer them antivirals as a preventative measure.
9. The 'containment' phase which has now ended helped slow the spread of the virus and offered the NHS the time to build up medical supplies and make significant progress towards developing a vaccine.
10. The Department of Health has now signed contracts to purchase sufficient vaccine to vaccinate the entire population with the first deliveries expected to arrive in the autumn.

11. Decisions are yet to be made about who will be prioritised to receive the first doses of the vaccine, but it is anticipated that frontline health staff will be considered alongside at-risk groups.
12. The new 'treatment' phase which we are now in means that instead of being systematically swabbed and tested for swine flu, suspected cases are now being clinically diagnosed by GPs.
13. Family doctors can issue vouchers for antiviral medication which 'flu friends' can collect for the person who is unwell.
14. GPs will try and target the use of antivirals at vulnerable groups - children under 5, pregnant women and those with under-lying health problems.
15. But there is enough for everybody. Anyone who needs the antiviral drugs can have them.
16. The UK has one of the largest stockpiles of antivirals in the world and here in Cumbria, we have ample supplies for our needs.
17. Antivirals can help to reduce the length of illness by around one day. They aren't the perfect treatment, because there is no perfect treatment, but they do help to reduce the symptoms if they're given early.
18. Plans are also being put in place for a national flu service. This will allow people to be diagnosed and given a voucher for antivirals either online or via a central call centre. This will make it easier for patients and relieve pressure on GPs as cases increase.
19. In line with other parts of the UK, the move away from testing to diagnosis by GPs means anyone with flu-like symptoms will be treated as having swine flu.
20. We therefore expect to have more suspected cases in Cumbria.
21. The end of systematic laboratory testing, however, means we will no longer be able to confirm cases. We are however, working to determine whether an alternative system could be put in place to provide the media with information on the spread of the virus in our area over the coming months.
22. The Health Protection Agency is now also publishing figures for flu-like illnesses each Thursday on its website [www.hpa.org.uk](http://www.hpa.org.uk).
23. These figures show that so far, the number of cases in the north of England have been low in comparison to the rest of the country.
24. In the week ending 5 July, the HPA's figures show GP consultation rates for flu-like illness have increased markedly in England.
25. The rate (51.9 cases per 100,000) was above the threshold level for normal seasonal flu activity (30 cases per 100,000); rates in the south of England were

particularly high (77.6), and the north of England low (6.8). We expect this number to increase in the weeks and months ahead.

26. There are simple measures that people can take to protect themselves from the flu, including regular and thorough hand-washing. It's important to cover the mouth and nose when coughing and sneezing and to turn away from other people in the vicinity.

27. Paper tissues should be used to cover the nose and mouth and these should be disposed of in a bin immediately after use. It's important to wash the hands again after disposing of used tissues.

28. In short: CATCH IT; BIN IT; KILL IT.

29. If people believe they may have contracted the swine flu virus they should:

Stay at home

Check their symptoms on [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk) if possible

Call the Swine Flu Information line on 0800 1 513 513 to hear the latest advice

If they have taken these steps and are still concerned, they should telephone their GP. Or NHS Direct on 0845 4647. They will give advice on symptoms and the next steps to take

People should not go to A&E or their GP surgery

30. As the tourism season gets underway in Cumbria, we would particularly ask businesses to make visitors aware of this information should it be needed during their stay in the county.

31. Some of the symptoms are the sudden onset of fever, cough or shortness of breath. Other symptoms can include headache, sore throat, tiredness, aching muscles, chills, sneezing, runny nose or a loss of appetite.

32. Most people will recover completely within a week without the need for antiviral medication.

33. People should try and make sure they have a friend, relative or neighbour who can act as their flu friend and collect medicines, food and other supplies if they become unwell.

34. Most cases of Swine Flu have not been severe and we are in a strong position to deal with this pandemic. But we must not become complacent.

**ENDS**

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