

Health protection advice for community pharmacists SWINE FLU

The following advice has been prepared by the National Public Health Service and the Welsh Pharmacy Board. It is intended to support community pharmacists and their staff in Wales with guidance on how to limit the spread of swine flu whilst continuing to provide a dispensing service.

General advice

- Patients with flu like symptoms are to be encouraged not to attend the pharmacy in person and to stay at home.^{1,2}
- Persons affected are asked to send a healthy family member / friend (also known as a flu friend) to the pharmacy to collect medicines.¹
- Where home delivery exists patients should be encouraged to make arrangements for a non symptomatic person to be available to receive the delivery.
- In general staff in pharmacies would not need to do anything more than follow general guidance of good hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette and being vigilant in managing symptomatic patients in the pharmacy.
- Staff should wash / clean their hands regularly during the working day, as soon as they get to work, when they arrive home and after contact with symptomatic patients.^{2,3,4}
- Hands should be cleaned frequently using soap and water or alcohol based hand rubs that contain an emollient that doesn't require water^{3,4}
- Hands should be thoroughly dried preferably with a disposable paper towel which can be discarded in domestic waste.⁴
- If pharmacy staff should come into contact with a symptomatic patient, the patient should be advised to use a tissue to cover their nose and mouth if coughing and /or sneezing.^{2,4,5} The tissue should be disposed of promptly in the domestic waste and the patient should wash their hands.^{2,4,5}
- When handling prescriptions or money from symptomatic patients staff should minimise contact with their mouth, eyes and nose until their hands have been cleaned.⁴
- Face masks (surgical) in general are not recommended for use by community pharmacy staff to go about their everyday business.^{6,7}
- One to one close contact consultations with symptomatic patients should be avoided, however if contact with a symptomatic patient of <1 metre is inevitable a risk assessment should be undertaken to inform any decision to wear a face mask⁴. It is not advisable to wear face masks all the time as they are uncomfortable and lose efficacy when damp.

Environmental

- Prominently displayed signs could be used on pharmacy windows and doors to discourage patients with flu like symptoms from presenting at the pharmacy.^{3,4}
- Frequently touched surfaces such as work surfaces, door handles and any medical equipment should be cleaned regularly (at least twice daily)⁴ with normal household detergent.^{3,4,5}
- Where practicable a separate area for symptomatic patients awaiting pharmacy advice or medications could be made available.³
- Waste bins used for discarded tissues should be emptied regularly.
- Where available hand hygiene facilities, supplies of tissues and lined foot operated waste bins for patient use should be used.³
- Where practical, consideration should be given to minimising the amount of soft furnishings and other objects that could potentially become contaminated and are difficult to clean.^{3,4}

Protective clothing

Close clinical contact is described as prolonged contact e.g when undertaking physical assessments / investigations or invasive procedures where this is a risk of flu transmission by contamination with body fluids such as blood, secretions or excretions.³

- Face masks in general are not recommended for use by community pharmacy staff.^{6,7}
- It is anticipated that in most community pharmacies prolonged or regular close clinical contact with symptomatic patients is unlikely.
- If face masks are worn, staff must follow the procedures for their safe use, paying particular attention to the type used, how they are removed and disposed of.^{3,4}
- Further guidance on risk assessments and the use of surgical face masks can be found at the following URL address: http://www.hpa.org.uk/web/HPAwebFile/HPAweb_C/1241246622785
- Protective clothing such as aprons, gloves, goggles and are only recommended for use by healthcare workers if they come into close clinical contact (within one metre) with a person with flu like symptoms particularly where there is a risk of flu transmission by contamination with body fluids e.g blood, secretions and excretions.³

References

1. NHS Direct. *Swine Flu / H1N1 virus communication to Community Pharmacy from NHS Direct*. May 2007.
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5. Royal Pharmaceutical Society for Great Britain. Swine influenza. Questions and Answers for pharmacists. June 2009. Available at: <http://rpsgb.org.uk/pdfs/fluq&a.pdf> [accessed 22 June 2009].
6. NHS Choices – Swine Flu Q and A. Available at: <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Pandemic-flu/Pages/QA.aspx> [accessed 22 June 2009].
7. Health Protection Agency. Swine flu: frequently asked questions. Available at: http://www.hpa.org.uk/web/HPAweb&HPAwebStandard/HPAweb_C/1240812255916 [accessed 22 June 2009].

The Information contained within this guidance is correct at the time of writing.
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