

CURRENT SITUATION

Seasonal Influenza – unlike many parts of the world Bangladesh is experiencing the normal seasonal influenza. Typically, here the peak influenza times are April and June.

Influenza H1N1 2009 has been indentified in Bangladesh. At the moment the number of cases is small but it must be assumed that this will change and that the course in Bangladesh will resemble that of other countries.

INFLUENZA H1N1 2009 – FACTS AND CONCERNS

Influenza H1N1 2009 is a mutation of a swine flu virus to produce a new human influenza strain. It is a type A influenza, subtype H1N1. Because it is a new flu strain there is no pre-existing human immunity for it and no current vaccination available for it.

Like all flu viruses it is easily spread – mainly by the inhalation of infected droplets from coughs and sneezes. At the present time most people infected have relatively mild symptoms, which get better. All flu infections may RARELY cause severe illness or death, it is unclear yet as to whether this strain is more or less likely do this.

INFLUENZA SYMPTOMS

Currently in Dhaka there are many viral illnesses circulating – most cause minor ‘cold’ or gastroenteritis symptoms.

Influenza symptoms include:

- High fever (>38.5)
- Cough (often dry)
- Muscle aches
- Sore throat
- Runny nose
- Headache
- Extreme tiredness

Most people with influenza will get better without needing to see a doctor. People can self treat by:

- STAYING AT HOME – do NOT go to work or school.
- Increasing fluid intake
- Resting
- Taking Paracetamol (Acetaminophen) or Ibuprofen as required for aches or pains. (Aspirin should NOT be given to children <12 yrs)

People should seek medical help if:

- Breathing problems or worsening asthma
- Worsening of any pre-existing medical condition
- Young babies
- Rash appears
- Any travel to a malaria area

MEDICINES

- Tamiflu. This is an antiviral medicine. It is sometimes used to treat influenza within the first 48 hours. In the UK it is most often used in people who would be considered at 'high risk' of flu complications – e.g. asthma, those with other serious illnesses or worsening of a chronic health problem. (NICE guidelines UK). It is available locally but should only be used on Doctor's advice.
- Antibiotics are NOT effective against viruses and so are NOT usually required. Sometimes a secondary bacterial infection may occur and an antibiotic may then be prescribed by your health care provider.

INFLUENZA VACCINATION

Influenza vaccine can help to protect against the yearly, seasonal flu. If you have access to the vaccine then it would be sensible to have it.

Unfortunately ICDDR,B Travellers Clinic has NO current stocks of influenza vaccine.

GENERAL PRECAUTIONS

In order to reduce your risk of both catching and spreading viral illnesses you should:

- COVER your mouth when coughing or sneezing
- WASH hands with soap and water frequently, especially after coughing/sneezing, going to the bathroom, before eating and before preparing food.
- AVOID touching your mouth, nose and eyes with your hands.
- STAY AT HOME when unwell with fever and for at least 24 hours after fever has settled.

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