



Australian Government
Department of Health and Ageing

**Australian Government
Pandemic Influenza
Communication Strategy
Overview**

May 2006

Annex to

**Australian Health
Management Plan for**

**PANDEMIC
INFLUENZA**

IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR ALL AUSTRALIANS

2006

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1 Introduction

This communication strategy supports the preparation for, response to and recovery from an influenza pandemic as outlined in the Australian Health Management Plan for Pandemic Influenza (AHMPPI) and should be read in conjunction with that plan.

Governments, acting on their own, cannot respond effectively to a pandemic, they need cooperation from businesses, non-government organisations and individuals. Communicating to these groups is therefore an essential component of an influenza pandemic planning and response strategy.

The communications strategy is designed to be flexible. It will be adapted and expanded as required to accommodate new policy measures, developments in the disease threat and to ensure communications effectively address the changing information needs of Australian's.

Key elements of the communication strategy are:

- A media engagement strategy to ensure that news media receive timely, accurate and authoritative information to support their reporting.
- A comprehensive market research program to ensure that communications effectively meet public needs.
- A national information campaign using a range of media, including electronic, print and online media and communications materials delivered through health providers.
- Direct-access information services, such as call centres and websites, to provide up-to-date information and advice.
- Clinical information resources to support primary care providers.

The stages of implementation of the communications strategy are identified in four communication stages. These communication stages correspond with the World Health Organisation's (WHO) global phases and the Australian phases of a pandemic and are illustrated in Appendix A.

Note: Australia is currently (May 2006) classified at Overseas Phase 3 Aus Phase 0.

2 Communication Coordination

The Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA) will continue to work closely with key agencies to plan and coordinate a consistent communications response regarding avian and pandemic influenza issues. This is at an international, Federal, state, territory and local level, across governments and other relevant industries.

DoHA through the Office of Health Protection (OHP) has the lead role in communicating human health issues to the public and primary care providers. The responsibilities of the OHP include:

- Lead national health activities preparing to respond to a possible pandemic or other health emergency.
- Manage the National Medical Stockpile, including stocking and maintenance of all medicines and protective equipment including antiviral drugs.
- Develop and manage a policy and legislation framework, including developing proposed National Health Security Legislation and implementing International Health Regulations.
- Establish principles and plans for support of essential services in the event of a pandemic or other health emergency.
- Operate an enhanced National Incident Room.
- Plan and implement strong border control measures aimed at keeping communicable diseases out of the country.
- Strengthen disease surveillance systems and contact tracing capacity.
- Build laboratory capacity to deal with existing and emerging communicable diseases.
- Enhance response to food-borne illness.
- Be responsible for communications with the Australian public regarding a possible or actual pandemic.

DoHA is working closely with other government departments who play key roles in planning for and responding to an influenza pandemic threat, including:

- The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) who will provide travel advice and warnings to Australians travelling internationally.
- The Department of Industry Tourism and Resources (DITR) who is responsible for providing information to assist business with continuity planning in the context of a pandemic.
- The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) who plays a lead role in communicating with the Australian public on animal and plant related issues such as possible outbreaks and the domestic and border quarantining of animals that may be infected with a contagious virus.
- The Department of Families and Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FACISIA) who will support communities during and after a pandemic.

2.1 Communication networks

DoHA manages and participates in a variety of committees to enable a coordinated Government assessment and response; and to ensure preparedness in the event of an influenza pandemic. These include:

- The Australian Health Protection Committee (AHPC)
- The National Influenza Pandemic Planning Action Committee (NIPAC)
- The Communicable Diseases Network of Australia (CDNA)
- The National Communication Network (NCN)
- The National Health Emergency Media Response Network (NHEMRN)
- The Australian Government Inter-Departmental Committee managed through PM&C

The recommendations and plans put forward by these groups will have significant impact on the development of a strategic communications-related response.

The National Health Emergency Media Response Network (NHEMRN) is a group coordinated by DoHA's Media Unit within the Communications Branch. The role of this network is to keep the public and media informed during national health emergencies. The NHEMRN has a vital role in disseminating coordinated and consistent information to the public, health professionals and the media regarding avian and pandemic influenza. The NHEMRN comprises media liaison managers in all State and Territory health agencies and other relevant Australian Government agencies including DAFF, Customs, Immigration, Emergency Management Australia and Australian Quarantine and Inspection Services (AQIS). Public Affairs Officers from all medical colleges and associations are also a vital part of this network.

The Network, which works closely with similar public health, emergency services and national security media liaison groups, meets regularly and holds exercises and workshops to continually refine coordinated public and media responses to new and emerging health crises.

3 Target Audiences

The communication strategy primarily focuses on the information needs of the general public and primary care providers such as, general practitioners and pharmacists. The information needs of groups such as, but not limited to, the business community, (particularly essential service sectors, like hospitals, law enforcement and utility services) and the broader health and community care sector will be supported under this strategy but are more fully addressed under the National and Commonwealth Action Plans.

3.1 General public

During Communication Stage One, the prevention stage, communications activities will build public awareness and understanding around the risk of avian influenza and an influenza pandemic. Throughout stage two and three, the preparedness and response stages of an influenza pandemic, the communication strategy will ensure that Australian's have access to clear and current information that supports actions to minimise the risk of illness. Activities during Communication Stage Four, the recovery stage, will support restoration of public confidence and a return to more normal living and working arrangements.

To ensure equitable access to information, careful consideration will be given to development of communications specifically for Australians from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds and for vulnerable groups. This will be achieved through specific media channels and communication resources and through representative bodies and community groups.

Across the communications program, market research will be undertaken with the general public to guide the ongoing development of communication activities and to gauge the public's awareness levels, concern and response to the recommended public health measures.

3.2 Primary care providers

Recognising the important role of primary care providers such as general practitioners, information resources will be provided to support them in responding to patient concerns and in the event of an influenza pandemic, to assist them to diagnose, treat and manage influenza cases. Pharmacists will also be supported with information to enable them to effectively respond to enquiries from the public. In addition, information will be provided to members of the health sector that have close contact with the general public such as, but not limited to, specialists, practice management staff, dentists, optometrists and allied health professionals.

DoHA will work closely with jurisdictions to facilitate the development of national information resources that state and territory governments can use among health care staff working in the hospital system.

4 Communication Response

4.1 Communications Stage One

Overseas Phase 1-2	Animal infection overseas: the risk of human infection or disease is considered low to substantial.
Overseas Phase 3 and/or AUS Phase 0-1	Human infection overseas with new subtype(s) but no human-to-human spread or at most rare instances of spread to a close contact. No circulating animal influenza subtypes in Australia that have caused human disease.

Key communication objectives

Communications activities during Communication Stage One, aim to build a base level of awareness and understanding across the general public and primary care providers regarding the nature of the risk of avian influenza and the threat of an influenza pandemic.

Key messages to the general public will explain

- What is bird flu (avian influenza).
- What is an influenza pandemic.
- What is the current disease situation.
- What is the government doing to prepare for an influenza pandemic.
- Basic hygiene measures that will help restrict the spread of any influenza virus.
- Why it is important that eligible people continue with vaccinations as outlined in the Australian Immunisations Handbook.
- What are antiviral medications and their potential role during a influenza pandemic.
- The situation regarding the development and production of a vaccine to combat an influenza pandemic.
- Where to get further information.

Key messages to primary care providers will explain

Same as for general public, plus specific messages regarding:

- More details about bird flu (avian influenza) and the threat of an influenza pandemic.
- How to implement infectious disease control measures.

Communication elements

DoHA Website (www.health.gov.au)

The website informs the public, health professionals and the media about health measures, warnings and the current situation.

DoHA Free call information line (1800 004 599)

A free call information line is in operation during the hours of 8am to 6pm Monday to Friday. A recorded message is available at all other times directing callers to the Department's website. Callers requiring translation services are assisted through the Australian Government Translating & Interpreting Service (TIS).

Media engagement activities

A coordinated cross-government approach is in place to ensure accurate and consistent information is available to all types of media in a timely manner. Spokespeople such as Australia's Chief Medical Officer (CMO) is available to a wide range of media, including the medical press, to inform the public and health professionals about Australia's preparedness for an influenza pandemic.

Activities include:

- Media interviews.
- Special articles focusing on preventative measures.
- Public announcements.

Information resources

- Distribute a resource kit, including a DVD on infection control to GPs and other health professionals about pandemic preparedness and dealing with suspected cases of severe or emerging respiratory disease (this activity occurred in June and August 2005).
- Provide the brochure titled '*Been Away, Feel OK*' to all incoming international passengers (This has been occurring since October 2004).
- Produce and translate a national brochure on avian influenza and the threat of an influenza pandemic accessible from the website.
- Prepare an information resource to meet the information needs of Indigenous communities.
- Develop an electronic 'information bulletin' for key groups to facilitate the sharing of information and to provide regular updates on influenza pandemic planning.

Key messages to the general public will explain

- What is bird flu (avian influenza).
- What is an influenza pandemic.
- The current disease situation.
- Clear, specific actions that can be taken to limit the risk of catching bird flu (avian influenza) from diseased birds.
- Food safety and guidance around food preparation.
- Basic hygiene measures that will help restrict the spread of an influenza pandemic.
- What the government is doing to prepare for an influenza pandemic.
- What are antiviral medications and their potential role during an influenza pandemic.
- Where to get further information.

Key messages to primary care providers will explain

Same as for general public, plus specific messages regarding:

- Facts about bird flu (avian influenza), symptoms and diagnosis, modes of infection and treatment.
- Information regarding the prevention of animal to human transmission.
- Specific information regarding what is expected of health professionals under the current situation.
- What to do if you suspect someone has avian influenza.
- Their role in influenza pandemic preparations and response.

Proposed communication elements

DoHA Website (www.health.gov.au)

Website information and resources will be regularly updated with information to meet the needs of health professionals and the general public. Links will be provided to the DITR website for business continuity planning information for business owners and employees and to the DAFF website for animal disease information.

DoHA Free call information line (1800 004 599)

Phone lines and call centre staff will be expanded to respond to enquires around animal to human disease transmission and protection measures with links to the DAFF call centre which will handle animal disease enquiries.

Media engagement activities

Additional activities include:

- Inform state and territory animal health and human health authorities about the animal infections and in particular the risks to human health.
- Inform key industry, media, health care workers and other stakeholders about animal infections
- Regular media interviews and briefings.
- Public announcements on Australia's preparation for a disease outbreak by relevant Ministers.

Information resources

- Develop web based resources for consumer and health professionals, with printed versions developed as required for targeted distribution.
- Continue to provide the information bulletin to key stakeholders.
- Update resources for GPs as required.

^a At this stage communications with the Australian public would be primarily coordinated by the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

4.2 Communication Stage Two

Overseas Phase 4	Small clusters overseas consistent with limited human-to-human transmission.
Overseas Phase 5	Large clusters of human cases overseas, substantial pandemic risk.
and/or	
AUS Phase 3	Human cases in Australia, none or rare instances of human-to-human spread.
AUS Phase 4	Small clusters in Australia consistent with limited human-to-human transmission.
AUS Phase 5	Large clusters of human cases in Australia, substantial pandemic risk.

Key communication objectives

Communications activities during Communication Stage Two will aim to build strong awareness of the pandemic threat and what can be done to prepare, including, the personal actions that can be undertaken to minimise the impact of the disease in Australia.

Key messages to the general public will explain

- Facts about the virus presenting the pandemic threat – symptoms and mode of infection.
- Strategies to help protect individuals, families and communities prepare for and respond to the threat.
- What they need to do if they think they have the new strain of influenza.
- The importance of practicing prevention and containment strategies to slow the spread of the disease to allow time for a vaccine to be made and distributed.
- What the government is doing and especially disease containment measures.
- The role of antiviral medication and how they will be used.
- Where to get further information.

Key messages to primary care providers will explain

Same as for general public, plus specific messages regarding:

- Use of personal protective equipment.
- The procedures for managing patients with pandemic influenza.
- Deployment of antivirals.
- Points of local information, including where to access information about designated influenza hospitals and fever clinics.

Proposed communication elements

DoHA Website (www.health.gov.au)

The website will be reviewed daily and updated as required with links to information across the Australian Government. Information regarding prevention, protection and treatment of pandemic influenza will be available for download and use by the general public, medical practitioners, business and community groups. Links to relevant Australian Government websites containing information and advice will also be updated regularly.

DoHA Free call information line (1800 004 599)

As required, phone lines, call centre staff and hours of operation will be increased. There will be an increase in hotline capacity to 24 hour availability and an 1800 number for health professionals will be introduced.

Media engagement activities

Activities include:

- Expand national health media liaison team; accelerate media monitoring and engagement; close liaison with state and territory media units.
- Escalate involvement of NHEMRN – daily teleconferences of the whole network and additional contact with Health representatives if required.
- Daily distribution of relevant information to spokespeople/media advisers via email.
- Establish a dedicated media conference room in the Department of Health and Ageing.

National Information campaign

If not already undertaken, a national information campaign will be activated to alert the public that the likelihood of an influenza pandemic has increased. The campaign will include a comprehensive advertising strategy utilising a range of media, including electronic, print and online media to support the messages in communication materials and other services; and additional resources available to the public.

A range of media will be used to ensure that messages are quickly and comprehensively delivered to Australians from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds and vulnerable groups.

Information Resources

- Distribute information to the public in a number of languages. Content will cover key facts, disease protection strategies, what communities can do to prepare and information on the Government's plans.
- Distribute a culturally appropriate resource for Indigenous and NESB communities.
- Distribute an information kit to primary care providers, providing information on government planning for an influenza pandemic, the expected role of GPs in a pandemic.
- Distribute Health Declaration Cards to all incoming passengers from overseas.
- Deploy additional resources as needed to cover issues such as treatment, antiviral medication and vaccine development.
- Continue to provide the information bulletin to key stakeholders.

Information will be updated and redistributed as needed throughout these phases.

4.3 Communications Stage Three

Overseas Phase 6	<p>Pandemic Overseas: Efficient and sustained human-to-human transmission.</p> <p>Increased and sustained transmission in the general population in Australia, but cases are still localised to one area of the country.</p> <p>Increased and sustained transmission in the general population in Australia and cases are occurring in multiple regions of the country.</p> <p>Increased and sustained transmission in the general population in Australia but the number of cases is subsiding.</p> <p>The next wave of the pandemic has reached Australia indicated by an increase again in the number of cases.</p>
and/or	
AUS Phase 6a	
AUS Phase 6b	
AUS Phase 6c	
AUS Phase 6d	

Key communication objectives

Communications activities during the Communication Stage Three will inform and reinforce the need for the appropriate actions that will minimise disease transmission and that will support the maintenance of essential community services.

The communications strategy will be enhanced to support the deployment of the National Medicines Stockpile and a pandemic vaccine, once it is available.

Key messages to the general public will explain

- Facts about the pandemic virus, symptoms and modes of infection.
- Personal protection, prevention and treatment options.
- The importance of practicing prevention and containment strategies to slow the spread of the disease to allow time for a vaccine to be made and distributed.
- What you need to do if you think you have influenza.
- What the government is doing.
- Where to get further information.
- What services and support packages are available.
- Availability and access to anti-viral medication and any available vaccine.

Key messages to primary care providers will explain

Same as for general public, plus specific messages regarding:

- The procedures for managing patients with pandemic influenza.
- What the government is doing to contain infection.

Proposed communication elements

DoHA Website (www.health.gov.au)

The website will be updated throughout each day with news bulletins from the CMO. Regular posting of media interviews by the CMO, Ministers and the Prime Minister, including MP3 sound bytes, pictures and additional educational materials.

DoHA Free call information line (1800 004 599)

At this phase the information line would be enhanced, possibly by involving several call centre agencies and would be available 24 hours.

Media engagement activities

Media engagement will be intensified. All the activities listed under AUS Phases 3-5 will continue with the inclusion of:

- Activation of the expanded media liaison team including co-opting emergency trained public affairs officers from other agencies, states and territories and the private sector.
- Deployment of media liaison officers to key trigger points of media activity, such as distribution points for antiviral drugs and quarantined areas.
- Utilising the media centre of Emergency Management Australia if required.
- Enlisting the services of Australian Associated Press as a one-stop information service
- Enhanced media monitoring.

National Information Campaign

Once human-to-human transmission has been established a second national information campaign will be implemented to provide information on the situation and to encourage appropriate disease containment practices. It will also convey information around the Government response and what to do if individuals become ill. The public information campaign will be responsive to the needs of the public and primary care providers and further stages of the campaign will be activated as required.

Information Resources

- Continue to provide the electronic information bulletin regularly.
- Update and redistribute all information resources as necessary.

DoHA Website (www.health.gov.au)

The website will be updated throughout the day with news bulletins, regular posting of media interviews by the CMO, Ministers and the Prime Minister, including MP3 sound bytes, pictures and additional educational materials.

DoHA free call information line

The capacity of the 1800 number for health professionals will be increased as needed.

4.4 Communication Stage Four

Key communication objectives

Communications activities during the Communication Stage Four will support restoration of public confidence and a return to more normal living and working arrangements.

Key messages to the general public will explain

- The containment of the pandemic.
- What support services are available for people who were affected by the disease.
- What the government is doing to minimise any future disease outbreaks.
- Where to get further information.

Key messages to primary care providers will explain

Same as for general public, plus specific messages regarding:

- Future strategies for their health care practice.
- Details on how the pandemic was contained and the medical learnings.

Proposed communication elements

DoHA Website (www.health.gov.au)

The website will continue to inform the public, health professionals and the media about the current situation and the support available.

DoHA Free call information line (1800 004 599)

The information line will continue to be available.

Media engagement activities

Australia's Chief Medical Officer will continue to be available to a wide range of media, including medical press to talk on the management of the pandemic and future measures.

Activities include:

- Regular media interviews and briefings.
- Publicising of announcements about Australia's planning for future pandemics by Australian Government Ministers and the Prime Minister.

Evaluation

Evaluation research and a review of all communications processes and activities will be undertaken to analyse the effectiveness of the Australian Government's communications response. The outcomes will be used to assist planning for future disease outbreaks.

5 Appendix A

Communication Stage One

Overseas Phase 1-2	Animal infection overseas: the risk of human infection or disease is considered low to substantial.
Overseas Phase 3 and/or	Human infection overseas with new subtype(s) but no human-to-human spread or at most rare instances of spread to a close contact.
AUS Phase 0-1	No circulating animal influenza subtypes in Australia that have caused human disease.
AUS Phase 2	Animal infection in Australia: substantial risk of human disease.

Communication Stage Two

Overseas Phase 4	Small clusters overseas consistent with limited human-to-human transmission.
Overseas Phase 5 and/or	Large clusters of human cases overseas, substantial pandemic risk.
AUS Phase 3	Human cases in Australia, none or rare instances of human-to-human spread.
AUS Phase 4	Small clusters in Australia consistent with limited human-to-human transmission.
AUS Phase 5	Large clusters of human cases in Australia, substantial pandemic risk.

Communication Stage Three

Overseas Phase 6 and/or	Pandemic Overseas: Efficient and sustained human to human transmission.
AUS Phase 6a	Increased and sustained transmission in the general population in Australia, but cases are still localised to one area of the country.
AUS Phase 6b	Increased and sustained transmission in the general population in Australia and cases are occurring in multiple regions of the country.
AUS Phase 6c	Increased and sustained transmission in the general population in Australia but the number of cases is subsiding.
AUS Phase 6d	The next wave of the pandemic has reached Australia indicated by an increase again in the number of cases.

Communication Stage Four

Overseas Phase 7 and/or	Little to no cases reported, pandemic contained.
AUS Phase 7	Little to no cases reported within Australia, pandemic contained.