

A few words on flu

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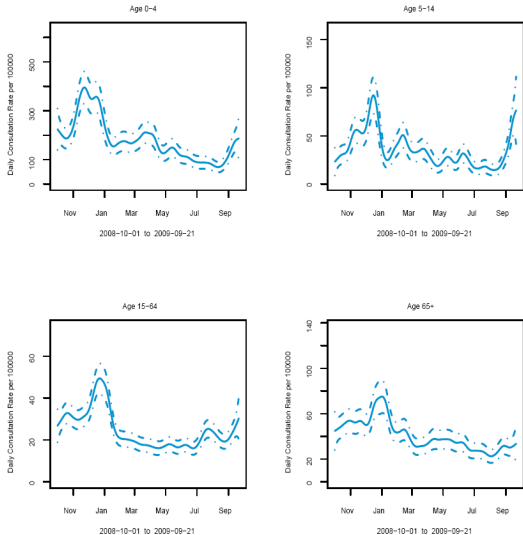
Pandemic

A novel influenza virus, “swine flu” or A/H1N1v, is spreading around the world.

Made a brief appearance in Edinburgh last semester.

So far, very little flu in Lothian.

But...

Figure 3: GP consultation rate for ILI and ARI by age group until 21 September 2009

How serious is it?

- ▶ Compared to other strains of influenza, relatively mild
- ▶ but still, we'll be lucky if no UoE student dies of it this winter:
using **lowest** reputable estimates,
 $25,000 \text{ students} \times 30\% \text{ CAR} \times 0.04\% \text{ CFR} = 3 \text{ deaths expected}$
CAR : clinical attack rate, proportion who experience symptoms
CFR: case fatality rate, proportion of those showing symptoms who die
- ▶ and although those with underlying conditions e.g. asthma are most at risk, 25% of deaths are in people with none (source: WHO)
- ▶ It is possible – nobody knows how probable – that the virus may change, e.g. to become more virulent, or to be resistant to Tamiflu.

How flu spreads

Three methods, relative importance still uncertain:

- ▶ Droplets: relatively large bodies of water containing virus, from cough, sneeze or talking, stay airborne only briefly, locally.
- ▶ Fomites: objects and surfaces contaminated by virus
- ▶ Aerosol spread: tiny droplets that can stay airborne for hours.

How – and why – to slow the spread

Flu may well peak before vaccination is widely available.

“We expect our intensive care corridor to look very different, four to five weeks from now” ERI consultant, 23/9/09

Aim: flatten peak of infections so as not to overwhelm medical services.

Hence:

- ▶ cover your cough, but not with your bare hand (“catch it bin it kill it”)
- ▶ wash your hands often (alcohol gel useful when no access to soap and water)
- ▶ **stay away from people when you may be infectious:** even if you have a mild case, the person you infect might not.

What else can we do?

Be prepared to stay at home with no notice: have at least

- ▶ a few cans of soup or whatever other very easy food you like
- ▶ paracetamol, cough sweets, tissues
- ▶ a mutual support plan with a friend (“flu buddy”)

If you get ill

- ▶ follow general guidance about whether or when to get medical help
- ▶ don't come to lectures, tutorials, labs etc. until **at least** 24 hours without fever (unmedicated)
- ▶ expect a few days where you feel fine for an hour or so and then need to go back to bed: work at home those days!
- ▶ tell your DoS asap.

More information

- ▶ <http://www.safety.ed.ac.uk/resources/General/pandemic.shtm>
 - links to *Student and Parents FAQ*, also to several official sites e.g. WHO
- ▶ Lots of specialist sites on the web, mostly set up because of concern about H5N1, “bird flu” – which, by the way, has not gone away. Much useful information but also much paranoia and sheer craziness: have your wits about you!