

# Start of the influenza season 2010-11 in Europe dominated by 2009 pandemic influenza A(H1N1) virus

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The influenza season 2010-11 in Europe has started with increasing transmission in 11 countries [1]. The currently circulating strains are predominantly the 2009 pandemic influenza A(H1N1) and influenza B viruses [1], strains that are included in the current trivalent seasonal influenza vaccine. The United Kingdom (UK), so far the most affected country, has seen a number of outbreaks. Although the majority of cases in the UK are mild, a significant number of severe hospitalised cases and several deaths have occurred, some in patients belonging to risk groups, including pregnant women [2]. This has resulted in an increased demand of intensive care treatment and respiratory support including extracorporeal membrane oxygenation (ECMO). Most patients are under 65 years of age.

In the past epidemics have most often progressed from west to east in Europe [3]. There is a rapidly closing window of time during which public health and clinical interventions can mitigate the impact of this season's influenza epidemics on morbidity and mortality. Countries should be prepared for increased demand for healthcare assistance and promote early sample collection and testing for patients with influenza-like-illness.

Influenza vaccination with the 2010 trivalent seasonal influenza vaccine is the most effective prevention measure and is recommended in particular for those at risk of developing severe disease [4]. There is strong evidence suggesting that the A(H1N1) component of the seasonal vaccine will be highly effective against influenza-like illness caused by the pandemic influenza A(H1N1) virus. Good protection was achieved as early as eight days after vaccination [5].

Early use of antiviral drugs for individuals belonging to risk groups will also be of value. The currently circulating variant can be expected to be sensitive to oseltamivir and zanamivir, as the old oseltamivir-resistant influenza A(H1N1) virus has been displaced by the pandemic strain and very few viruses so far have been reported as being resistant [6]. However, isolates should be monitored for the emergence of antiviral resistance, particularly in immunocompromised patients.

## References

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