

Dear Colleague

H1N1 INFLUENZA VIRUS – MONITORING FLU-LIKE ILLNESS IN GENERAL PRACTICE

I am writing this letter to explain steps being taken to improve monitoring of the number of patients with flu-like illness presenting to general practices. I would like to ask practices to help with this by

- Coding all flu like illness which might indicate H1N1 virus infection as **H27.. Influenza**
- Facilitating the installation of software to extract anonymised flu data
- Allowing automatic extraction of aggregated and anonymised flu data every night.

As you are aware, there are increasing numbers of confirmed cases of H1N1 influenza virus in Scotland mainly occurring in clusters. It is likely that these cases reflect a larger number of milder cases which are not recognised because of the lack of links to travel or contacts.

It is important that we monitor presentations of flu like illness in general practices across Scotland to gain early warning of potential clusters and outbreaks. Not all of these will be due to influenza H1N1 virus but any changes in trends of flu like illness will mirror trends of H1N1 virus.

Health Protection Scotland (HPS) will need regular (up to daily) reports from practices which will be collated to provide a local and national picture. This will also give a picture of the volume of flu-related work being experienced by practices, which is higher than that reflected in the number of confirmed cases of H1N1 influenza.

**From the Chief Medical Officer
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Addresses

For action
NHS Board Medical Directors

For information
NHS Board Chief Executives
NHS Board Directors of Public Health

All of the GP IT suppliers will provide their practices with an electronic means of collecting data on patients presenting with flu like illness. This is designed to minimise work for practices by being collated overnight and sent automatically to HPS. No patient identifiable data will be required, just numbers of patients presenting, but data will be stratified by age and sex.

To improve the accuracy of this data, I would ask practices to use the Read code

H27.. Influenza

to record when patients present with symptoms of flu like illness which might indicate H1N1 virus infection, i.e.

*Pyrexia of $\geq 38^{\circ}\text{C}$ [OR fever] in the last 7 days **AND EITHER** Flu like illness (two or more of the following symptoms:*

*cough, sore throat, rhinorrhea, limb/joint pain, headache) **OR** severe community acquired pneumonia*

Please record this Read code in the electronic record of any patient or visitor presenting with these symptoms from now on, even if you also use other Read codes for more precise description of their illness.

Please note that recording this code does not mean that swabs or blood samples are required or that the patient needs antiviral medication- the necessity for these depends on the current guidance algorithm on the HPS web site.

<http://www.hps.scot.nhs.uk/>

Other Read code information will be collected in addition to this specific code including a broader set of codes indicating influenza/ flu like illness and acute respiratory illness. Taken together, these data will give early warning of changing patterns of illness and will allow for better and more focussed planning to deal with clusters and outbreaks, including support for practices when needed. Annex A summarises the data which it is planned will be sent to HPS under this process.

The software for this data collection is expected within the next few weeks. When the software is available from your supplier, I would ask you to facilitate its installation as soon as possible. We will ensure that practices are informed when the data collection commences and the detailed dataset.

This surveillance programme is supported by the Scottish General Practitioners Committee of the BMA and RCGP Scotland as part of Scottish GP contribution to the response to pandemic flu.

I am grateful to you for your continued support in the smooth management of the H1N1 influenza pandemic.

Yours sincerely

HARRY BURNS

Annex A

Age	Male/ Female	“Suspected ‘flu code’ H27..	All Influenza like illness - ILI	All Acute respiratory illness - ARI	Practice Population
<1	M				
1-4	M				
5-14	M				
15-44	M				
45-64	M				
65-74	M				
≥75	M				
<1	F				
1-4	F				
5-14	F				
15-44	F				
45-64	F				
65-74	F				
≥75	F				
All ages	All sexes				