

MEDIA RELEASE

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Pacific people and swine flu

“Keep it to yourself” is the advice from Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs chief executive Dr Colin Tukuitonga to Pacific people with the flu.

“Pacific people tend to live in larger households, often including several generations, and to mix with friends and family regularly,” Dr Tukuitonga said. “We’re great churchgoers, and like most New Zealanders we love to get together to celebrate birthdays and other important events, or watch the rugby.”

“But when there’s an infectious flu virus around it’s really important that we look at how we usually live, recognise how we can spread infection and change our habits as necessary.”

“There are some basic precautions we can all take to lower the chances of getting the flu, or to avoid spreading it.”

Signs and symptoms of influenza include fever, cough, sore throat, stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people also experience diarrhoea and vomiting. Dr Tukuitonga said safety measures which all health authorities are recommending include:

- **Stay home** if you are sick, rather than going to school or work.
- If you become sick **stay home for seven days** after your symptoms begin or until you have been symptom-free for 24 hours, whichever is longer
- **Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.**
- **Phone your doctor** or **Healthline 0800 611 116** if you or someone in your family gets sick, or is already sick and gets worse.
- **Do not turn up at a hospital or medical centre before phoning** for advice, as you can spread germs to other people.
- If you are caring for someone with the flu, watch for signs that they may need further medical attention.
- **Be prepared.** Have enough food water and basic medical supplies including paracetamol or ibuprofen, as well as any medicine you take regularly, nappies for babies, cleaning products, tissues and bathroom supplies for at least a week.
- **Hand hygiene** is still the single most effective measure in protecting yourself. Wash your hands with soap and water and dry them thoroughly.
- Alcohol-based cleaners are also effective. Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth as germs spread this way.

At this stage swine flu seems to be a mild to moderate illness which is unpleasant rather than life-threatening, Dr Tukuitonga said.

“We need to try and keep it that way by taking these precautions, and doing our bit to prevent it spreading.”

ENDS

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