

MEDIA MONITORS Swine flu update

Thursday, 28 May 2009

Australian coverage

In brief: Most coverage is fairly routine, recording growing numbers of infection and the 'isolation' of the cruise ship Pacific Dawn at Willis Island; the Sydney Morning Herald puts the 'isolation' in a rather different light. Overall, however, there is growing seriousness in the coverage, with warnings of much greater numbers of infection and possible deaths.

The Australian (National): The drama surrounding the flu ship Pacific Dawn intensified yesterday after a further outbreak of illness forced the liner to cancel scheduled stops and steam for a tiny island 420km off Cairns with all 2000 passengers confined aboard. The ship's owner, P&O, confirmed the passengers would be unable to disembark once the liner reached the barren 500m-long Willis Island, home to a weather station, until tests confirmed whether three crew members had the swine flu strain.

Australian Financial Review (National): The federal government has warned that the swine flu outbreak is likely to worsen based on overseas experience as companies across the country scrambled to limit their employees' exposure to the disease. Businesses are limiting travel, monitoring employees returning from overseas and reiterating the importance of hygiene as the number of confirmed cases looks set to climb. Health Minister Nicola Roxon warned of a possible jump in swine flu cases over the next 48 hours but said there was no need to panic as the severity of the flu remained mild so far. There were 67 confirmed cases yesterday.

The Advertiser (Adelaide): More than half of Australia's population would catch swine flu in a worst-case scenario, one of the nation's leading vaccine researchers warns. Australia's chief medical officer, Professor Jim Bishop, yesterday said two million people were at risk of infection as the disease spread. But Professor Nikolai Petrovsky, research director of SA-based biotechnology company Vaxine, said that estimate was at the lower end of the spectrum and up to two thirds of Australians could catch the potentially deadly disease.

The Age (Melbourne): Swine flu is now expected to infect one in five Australians this winter, costing the economy double the price of seasonal flu, authorities said yesterday. As the number of infected Australians climbed to 66 cases last night, with 34 in Victoria, experts warned that for every person infected, another 10 would now be carrying the highly contagious virus. Federal Health Minister Nicola Roxon yesterday acknowledged the H1N1 virus was spreading rapidly and said the Government was assessing new measures to contain it.

The Canberra Times: Federal Health Minister Nicola Roxon has warned Australia should expect swine flu deaths as another two Canberrans were confirmed yesterday to have the disease, bringing the national tally to 67. The Canberra Raiders NRL team is also on alert for signs of the H1N1 influenza after four referees from a Raiders game at the weekend were quarantined. Canberra now has three confirmed swine flu cases. The latest victims are a 43-year-old woman and a 21-year-old man who disembarked from P&O's Pacific Dawn in Sydney on Monday.

Courier Mail (Brisbane): More than 2500 people could be quarantined at sea off north Queensland today if a suspected swine flu outbreak aboard the P&O superliner Pacific Dawn is confirmed. A Brisbane medical laboratory is this morning analysing swabs from three suspected swine flu victims aboard the ship as it cruises into the Coral Sea. Federal Health Minister Nicola Roxon yesterday warned Australia should brace for a rapidly climbing swine flu toll in the next 48 hours as the national chief medical officer Professor Jim Bishop predicted up to two million Australians could catch the potentially fatal H1N1 this flu season.

Daily Telegraph (Sydney): He is Patient One. Six-year-old Nicholas Darcy is the recipient of the first Australian "community transmission" of swine flu catching the disease from someone with no known links to a host country or source. It is possible he got the disease via a childcare service that also cared for "Patient Zero", an unrelated child believed to be three years old whose identity remains a mystery. Nicholas and his family were passenger on board the P&O cruise ship Pacific Dawn which docked in Sydney on Monday, unleashing potentially dozens of swine flu cases on to Sydney and across Australia.

Herald Sun (Melbourne): Victorians worried that they have swine flu are paying up to \$100 for tests and more than \$50 for medication. Premier John Brumby called for calm after warnings one in eight - 600,000 Victorians - will get swine flu in the next 12 months. Despite the warnings the Government's advice to GPs has not been updated since 1.30pm on Friday – even though the virus has since started spreading. Under the current advice, GPs can order free tests for those who have recently returned from affected areas or have been in contact with confirmed cases, but all others must pay for tests.

The Mercury (Hobart): Tasmania's pandemic flu centres are being prepared as the nation is warned to brace for a rapid rise in swine flu cases in the next few days. Yesterday three children were excluded from three schools in the state because they had been to flu-affected countries. Principals have been directed to gear up for the influx of children, some having travelled, after the school holidays that start this weekend. And 10 Tasmanians, three with symptoms, were confirmed as being on a cruise ship affected by the illness.

Northern Territory News: Four Territorians are in self-imposed quarantine after being aboard a luxury cruise ship when swine flu broke out. They flew back to Darwin after the Pacific Dawn berthed in Sydney on Monday and immediately reported to their doctors. Centre for Disease Control director Vicki Krause said the cruise passengers had agreed to stay indoors for a week. "They're doing the right thing," she said.

Sydney Morning Herald: As health officials argued about swine flu, isolated cruise ship passengers were enjoying their time at sea last night- in the pool, gambling at the casino and watching the shows. In an email to her daughter Paula Sharp, passenger Irene Burton, 60, said 99 per cent of people were fine. "They're having fun, making the most of it." She said passengers were unperturbed about the constant changes to the itinerary of the 10-day voyage, which was to divert to a tiny island outside the Great Barrier Reef to prevent potentially infectious passengers and crew spreading the virus to the mainland.

The West Australian: Australians are being warned to expect deaths from swine flu as the number of people diagnosed escalates. Confirmed flu cases have jumped to 67, including one in WA, while some Perth families have been quarantined after being exposed to the virus. The first flu case was diagnosed on May 8 and the number of people infected has doubled each day since Monday. Health Minister Nicola Roxon said yesterday the States were expected to announce a surge in cases in the next day or so, mirroring the spread of the virus overseas.

Overseas coverage

In brief: There are no surprises in the overseas coverage, except, perhaps, for the numbers now emerging in the United States. Generally, newspaper reports are downbeat in tone and not prominent in display terms.

Europe

BBC News: The number of UK swine flu cases has reached 186 after a seriously ill Glaswegian man and an adult in the East Midlands were confirmed with the virus. The Scottish government confirmed the 37-year-old man, who is being treated in hospital for a respiratory infection, was Scotland's 14th case. He had been suspected of having the flu and has underlying health problems. The other new case of the H1N1 virus was a man from Nottinghamshire, the Health Protection Agency said.

The Times (London): More than 40 children have been infected with swine flu after an outbreak in a West Midlands school, it was confirmed yesterday. A total of 47 new cases of the H1N1 flu strain were announced, bringing the UK total to 184, health officials said. Of the newly confirmed cases, 44 were linked to an ongoing investigation into the outbreak at Welford Primary School in Handsworth, Birmingham. The Health Protection Agency (HPA) said last week that three cases of swine flu were linked to the school, which is closed for the half-term holidays.

The Independent (London): One more case of swine flu was confirmed today bringing the total in the UK to 185, health officials said. The new case is an adult from the East Midlands who recently returned from abroad, the Health Protection Agency said. A total of 171 cases have now been

confirmed in England, with 13 in Scotland and one in Northern Ireland. Another 155 possible cases are being investigated. Yesterday, 44 new cases were linked to Welford Primary School in Handsworth, Birmingham. The school, which had already confirmed six cases, is currently closed for the half-term holidays and is undergoing a "deep clean" ahead of its reopening next week.

Middle East

Gulf News (UAE): Four more people in the Philippines have been confirmed as having the new swine flu virus, bringing the total number of influenza A (H1N1) cases in the country to six, the government said on Wednesday. Two of the new cases were an adult male and adult female who got sick after contact with a Taiwanese woman and her daughter at a wedding party last week in a northern Philippine town, Health Secretary Francisco Duque said. The other two cases were a 13-year-old boy who came from Hong Kong on May 23 and a one-year-old girl who arrived on May 19 after a trip with her parents to the United States, Duque said.

Gulf Times (Qatar): Qatar has achieved the capability to conduct swine flu tests and get results within three hours, Public Health Department director Dr Mohamed al-Thani has said. "We have received swine flu influenza A(H1N1) testing kits from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in the US, through the World Health Organisation," he explained. Dr al-Thani was speaking on the sidelines of a Pandemic Crisis Management workshop organised by the College of the North Atlantic-Qatar yesterday. So far Qatar has been sending specimen samples from suspected cases to WHO for three-day confirmatory tests for H1N1 influenza. All results received have been negative.

Asia

China Daily: Despite highly cautious countermeasures, the number of A(H1N1) flu cases in China may rise dramatically in the future, said a leading expert. Once the virus enters a country, it begins to spread internally, said Scott Dowell, director of the Global Disease Detection Program at the US Center for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta. "We anticipate there will be domestic transmission of the virus in China like in other countries including Canada, Panama and Japan," he said. In most of the countries hit by the H1N1 flu, the cases have generally been found in international travelers instead of in people within the countries, he told China Daily last week. For China, however, that could soon change.

The Manila Times: The human swine flu toll in Asia grew Wednesday, as Australia's infections more than doubled and Japan and South Korea announced new cases, helping to push the global total to almost 13,000. Singapore confirmed its first case while Hong Kong, where Asia's first infection from the A(H1N1) virus sparked a week-long quarantine of around 300 guests and staff at a city hotel, announced a fresh total of 10. In Australia, Health Minister Nicola Roxon warned that the nation faced "a changing situation" and said she expected "some significant increasing numbers [of cases] over the next couple of days."

Bangkok Post: Swine flu has now infected 12,954 people in 46 countries since it was first uncovered last month, the World Health Organisation said on Tuesday. The number of deaths increased to 92 following an additional death in the United States, while the total caseload grew by 439 over the previous day, according to the WHO's daily tally of confirmed cases. The biggest growth was reported by the United States, with 212 new cases, bringing its total to 6,764, and in Canada where the caseload rose by 116 (total 921).

United States

New York Times: Two more New Yorkers have died with confirmed cases of swine flu, the city's health commissioner said on Tuesday, bringing the city's total number of deaths related to the virus to four. Emergency room visits and hospitalizations also continued to rise. The commissioner, Dr. Thomas R. Frieden, said the two latest casualties, a 41-year-old woman in Queens and a 34-year-old man in Brooklyn, were linked to the H1N1 virus by lab tests completed on Monday and Tuesday. Both patients had underlying health conditions that put them more at risk, he said.

Chicago Tribune: A second Illinois resident from the Chicago area has died from swine flu, according to the state Health Department. The person who died was a resident of suburban Cook County and had

"other significant medical conditions that increased vulnerability" to the H1N1 swine flu virus, the department said in a news release. Because of confidentiality and "out of respect for the family," the department said it will not be releasing details about the case. The first death of swine flu in Illinois was reported on Monday, also in the Chicago area. So far, there have been 976 confirmed swine flu cases in the Illinois.

Washington Post: The Loudoun County Health Department announced today its first confirmed case of the H1N1 virus, also known as the swine flu. The patient - a male under the age of 18 - did not require hospitalization and has fully recovered, said Loudoun County Health Department Director Dr. David Goodfriend, adding that the patient helped "minimize spread of the infection by remaining in voluntary isolation at home while ill." Dr. Goodfriend would not release details about where the patient may have traveled recently.