

## **DOCTORS CALL FOR FIRST-WAVE SWINE FLU VACCINE TO EXTEND TO ALL OF THE UK'S 2.4M DIABETICS**

DOCTORS today led calls for every member of the UK's 2.4m diabetic community to be made the highest priority for receiving the imminent vaccination against swine flu.

As cases of the H1N1 virus continue to soar, the Association of British Clinical Diabetologists (ABCD) put forward its case as plans were being finalised by health protection experts to launch the initial vaccination programme later this month.

Diabetes patients aged between six months and 65 years are set to be among the first wave of at-risk groups to be inoculated – a decision welcomed by ABCD.

But those people with diabetes aged over 65 are not included - and will have to wait for a later phase of the vaccination programme before they are protected.

ABCD is the national organisation representing more than 500 consultant physicians and registrars in Britain who specialise in *diabetes mellitus* – an increasingly common condition that affects an estimated 2.4 million people, although the actual figure is feared to be far higher.

Its former Chairman, Professor Ken Shaw, who coordinated the patient guidance, said: “We strongly believe that everyone who has diabetes should be treated as the highest priority, whatever their age.

“People with diabetes are six times more likely to be hospitalised in the event of an influenza pandemic, compared to people without the condition.

“They are significantly more at risk of developing complications from influenza, such as pneumonia. This risk is by far the greatest for those with known complications of diabetes, such as heart or kidney disease.

“Research has shown that a swine flu pandemic will result in a substantial increase in mortality and morbidity for people with diabetes – far higher than the general population.”

ABCD advises that as well as the risk to patients, a swine flu epidemic among the diabetes population will cause major disruption to hospital services.

They warn that routine clinics could be cancelled for as long as four months as specialist diabetologists are directed to more essential work, such as supporting GPs and other health services in the community with expert advice.

ABCD also fears that acute influenza infection could lead to a ten-fold increase in the number of those requiring urgent insulin therapy, compared to the normal experience of new insulin starts outside pandemic circumstances.

The association has issued updated guidance to all patients with diabetes about how they can best prepare themselves for a potential swine flu epidemic. And they reminded people with diabetes that the swine flu vaccination is over and above, not a replacement for, the winter flu jab which should still be taken.

#### **ABCD - advice for people with diabetes**

- 'Be Prepared'. People with diabetes should be aware of the special circumstances that occur with influenza infection.
- Preventative measures to avoid infection should be undertaken by the usual sensible precautions of minimising exposure as much as possible. Immunisation with the specific swine flu (H1N1) vaccination is strongly recommended with diabetes specified as a priority group.
- It is important to understand the potential adverse effect of influenza infection on day-to-day diabetes control, and to be aware of specific 'sick-day rules' that are available, usually as part of local educational guidance. In the event of influenza infection closer attention to diabetes control will be needed – in most cases by careful blood glucose self monitoring and adjusting treatment as appropriate. In particular, insulin should not be stopped and often the dose may need to be temporarily increased.
- Patient self-management with the support of local specialist diabetes resource is the key to successful outcome. Patients should advise their GP (by phone) when suffering from influenza, and should recognise the serious symptoms of increasing drowsiness, dehydration and respiratory distress, which may indicate urgent need for hospitalisation.

The above guidance has been drawn together by:

- Prof Ken Shaw, former Chairman of ABCD, an honorary consultant physician, specialising in general medicine, diabetes, endocrinology and metabolism; based at Queen Alexandra Hospital, Portsmouth Hospitals NHS Trust and Emeritus Professor of Medicine, University of Portsmouth.
- Dr Peter Winocour, Chairman of AMCD and consultant physician, Queen Elizabeth II Hospital, East and North Herts NHS Trust; and

- Dr Ian Gallen, Honorary Secretary ABCD, consultant physician and endocrinologist, Buckinghamshire Hospitals NHS Trust.

**Further press information and interview opportunities with the above available through Richard Chew 0845 389 2626**