



PRESS RELEASE

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ESCALATION OF PANDEMIC TO PHASE 6 BY THE WHO

The WHO has raised the Pandemic level from phase 5 to phase 6. What this means is that the conditions for a pandemic have been met, which are that the same virus has caused sustained community level outbreaks in at least two WHO Regions. This however had been known for quite some time and therefore the declaration was a widely expected one.

The WHO has also assessed the current pandemic severity to be “moderate”. This means that most people recover from the illness without the need for hospitalisation, although some local areas have had high levels of serious cases but most health systems have coped well.

The WHO has also published advice for all countries, grouped into countries with no transmission, those in transition and those with sustained transmission. Gibraltar currently falls into the category of countries with no transmission as we have not isolated any cases so far. This guidance essentially consists of increasing surveillance, making preparations and providing information.

Gibraltar has an established response system in place, with a Telephone Helpline, medical protocols, stockpiles of key medications, escalation plans and laboratory testing arrangements. We are awaiting delivery of another stockpile of second-line medications as well. Public education campaigns such as “Cough into your Sleeve” and home distribution of leaflets have been successfully instituted. The Government is actively pursuing a direct contract with manufacturers to supply Gibraltar with pandemic vaccine as soon as it is available.

Anticipating the escalation to phase 6, the GHA has already stepped up its level of surveillance and will continue to publicise its Telephone Helpline service (20044411). With the coming of the annual winter flu season in the months ahead, the GHA will be stepping up its programme of regular flu vaccinations and thus, in the worst case scenario, avoid the risk of two influenza infections at the same time.

At present, no cases of pandemic influenza have been detected in Gibraltar and it is hoped that things will remain that way, but if cases do occur, we are prepared.

Yvette Del Agua, Minister for Health and Civil Protection said:- “This Pandemic level therefore does not reflect that there has been any change in the medical characteristics or seriousness of the virus. It reflects only the fact that it has extended geographically. There is no cause for concern and people in Gibraltar should continue to follow the advice given in the Government leaflet”.