1. Influenza A(H7N9) notifiable as non-seasonal influenza

As of 12 August 2013 there have been 135 confirmed cases of influenza A(H7N9) in China, including 44 deaths. The last case was reported on 11 August, and the previous one on 20 July 2013.

Infection with influenza virus A(H7N9) has been notifiable as non-seasonal influenza since 1 August under the Health Act 1956. In the event of a probable or confirmed case in New Zealand, the WHO will be notified through the Office of the Director of Public Health at the Ministry of Health.

The Ministry of Health continues to follow developments closely and has recently updated guidance about influenza A(H7N9). This information is available on our website at www.health.govt.nz/avian-influenza.

2. Seasonal Influenza Immunisation Programme: Unused vaccine after 31 July 2013

A refund is available for a total of 10 units of unused stock of either FLUVAX or FLUARIX from any single account. Unused stock must be returned by 31 August 2013 to qualify for a refund. After this date, the vaccine can be returned using the normal process for expired/damaged paediatric vaccine at your local ProPharma vaccine warehouse. Please contact your local immunisation coordinator if you are unsure of this process.

3. Claiming for the second dose of influenza vaccine for children

Practices can now submit claims for administering the second dose of influenza vaccine to eligible children.

Please check with your PHO to confirm that your DHB has agreed to fund the second dose, if funding is available you can send in a manual claim on or before 31 August 2013.

Information regarding submitting immunisation subsidy claims and manual claims forms can be found at www.health.govt.nz/new-zealand-health-system/claims-provider-payments-and-entitlements/immunisation-subsidy.

4. Seasonal Influenza in New Zealand

Weekly consultation rates for influenza-like illness in New Zealand 2008-2013 (to 11 August 2013)
The level of consultations for Influenza Like Illness (ILI) is still lower than that seen at the same time in the last few years. The graph on page one shows the weekly national consultation rates for ILI based on ESR’s GP sentinel surveillance – for the 2013 season so far, compared with previous years.

5. Claiming for children who are re-immunised following chemotherapy

General practices can submit an immunisation claim for services delivered when children are re-immunised following chemotherapy treatment.

The completed Immunisation Benefit Claim Details Form and Immunisation Benefit Claim Summary Form should be submitted to the Ministry of Health Sector Services. Send completed claim forms to: Immunisation claims, Sector Services, PO Box 1026, Wellington, 6104. The indication value that best meets the definition for re-immunisation is 6 – booster.

A guide to completing the claim form is available at www.health.govt.nz/new-zealand-health-system/claims-provider-payments-and-entitlements/immunisation-subsidy

An Immunisation claim cannot be submitted for a vaccine that is not listed on the immunisation schedule.

6. Pertussis (Whooping Cough) Update

Since the current outbreak began in August 2011, through to 9 August 2013, there have been a total of 9,842 cases (confirmed, probable and suspect) and 549 hospitalisations.

From 27 July to 9 August 2013, 85 new cases were reported. The highest numbers of new cases were in Canterbury (22 cases), Nelson Marlborough (18 cases) and Waikato (10 cases) DHBs. During that period, 70 percent (14/20) of DHBs have reported pertussis cases.

Since April 2013, there have been consistently fewer pertussis notifications per week compared with earlier in the outbreak period. This may indicate that the outbreak is drawing to a close. However, we continue to monitor the notifications to see if this pattern is sustained through the winter months.

To protect infants from severe disease please continue to encourage on time immunisation at ages six weeks, three months and five months and immunisation of pregnant women between 28 and 38 weeks gestation. Boostrix® (Tdap) is recommended and funded in every pregnancy between 28 and 38 weeks gestation regardless of the interval since a previous Tdap or Td vaccine.

7. Update on Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (MERS-CoV)

As of 13 August 2013 there have been 94 cases of laboratory-confirmed infection with MERS-CoV reported to the WHO, including 46 deaths. All cases have had a direct or indirect link to the Middle East. Please refer to WHO website at www.who.int/csr/disease/coronavirus_infections/en/ for more details. No cases of MERS-CoV have been detected in New Zealand.

The WHO convened the International Health Regulations Emergency Committee which has assessed the current MERS-CoV situation to be serious and of great concern. They advise that this does not constitute a Public Health Emergency of International Concern at this time. The Committee has offered technical advice to the WHO on a range of issues including travel related guidance, infection control and improvements in surveillance. They will meet again in September, or earlier if the situation changes significantly.

The Ministry of Health continues to follow developments closely and has recently issued updated guidance about MERS-CoV. This information is available on our website at www.health.govt.nz/mers-cov.

As part of New Zealand’s precautionary response to MERS-CoV, Cabinet has decided to list MERS-CoV in the Schedules to the Health Act 1956. Infection with MERS-CoV should therefore be notified under the Act. This step will ensure that all suspected, probable or confirmed cases for the disease will be notified to a Medical Officer of Health. It also ensures that there is a legal basis for prompt and comprehensive public health responses to minimise the spread of the disease, should these responses be required.

8. Infant formula recall

A reminder to regularly monitor the Ministry for Primary Industries (www.mpi.govt.nz) and Ministry of Health (www.health.govt.nz) websites for any updates about the recall of some Nutricia Karicare infant formula products which may have been contaminated with Clostridium botulinum.

If you have any queries about anything in this update, please email immunisation@moh.govt.nz.