



Epidemiology Unit

Ministry of Healthcare and Nutrition

231, De Saram Place, Colombo 01000, Sri Lanka

Tele: (+94 11) 2695112, 4740490, 4740491, 4740492 2681548 Fax: (+94 11) 2696583 E-mail: chepid@slt.net.lk, epidunit@slt.net.lk Web: www.epid.gov.lk

PRESS RELEASE

Present Influenza Situation in the Country

Attention had been drawn to some deaths including that of a few pregnant mothers that had occurred due to seasonal influenza infection during the last few weeks. Influenza viruses that were in circulation during the last 3-4 years in the country (Influenza B, Influenza A(H1N1)pdm09, Influenza A(H3N2)) had been found to be the causative organisms in these cases. Further, routine influenza surveillance data had revealed that a higher proportion of respiratory illnesses (flu) prevalent during months of March and April this year had been due to influenza virus infection in contrast to past years where low influenza activity had been recorded during these months.

Influenza viruses cause seasonal influenza infection or 'flu' among us. None of them are new or Novel viruses and have been seen circulating in the country during the last 3-4 years. Therefore it is common to find that varying degrees of protective immunity against these viruses had been developed among us.

Although 'flu' is usually a mild respiratory illness with fever, cough and cold which resolves on its own for most of the people, certain groups of people are at higher risk for developing severe disease e.g pneumonia. These are older people (>65years) or very young children (< 2years), pregnant women, people with suppressed immunity and those with chronic heart, liver, kidney and metabolic diseases. People with 'flu' especially these high-risk groups should take measures to seek medical attention if their 'flu' gets worse or if they develop difficulty in breathing despite treatment. Stocks of indicated anti viral drug to treat admitted patients with severe disease and updated clinical case management guidelines have been distributed to health institutions.

Public are encouraged to take general personal hygienic measures to prevent spread of respiratory infections such as covering mouth and nose with a tissue/handkerchief while sneezing and coughing when having flu, washing hands with soap and water frequently, avoiding touching face, avoiding overcrowded public places specially when having flu' and seeking medical attention for flu' if in a high risk group or when feeling ill. There is no vaccine offered from Government of Sri Lanka presently to prevent seasonal influenza infection.

There is no place for undue panic and concern since this seasonal influenza virus infection is not caused by a new/novel virus or is not an unknown disease condition. All possible measures to equip health institutions to handle influenza patients had been taken by the Ministry of Health.

Dr Paba Palihawadana

Chief Epidemiologist

Epidemiology Unit

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