

Cook Islands infection control workshop and drill exercise

A training workshop on infection control followed by a drill exercise was undertaken by SPC staff in Rarotonga from 23 to 31 July 2008. The purpose of this event was to assess Cook Islands' emergency preparedness and increase its capacity to respond appropriately to avian and pandemic influenza and other emerging and re-emerging infectious disease threats of local, national and international concern.

The majority of participants came from the Ministry of Health with representatives from other government ministries including Agriculture, Immigration and Customs.

Training activities were aimed at strengthening the infection control capabilities of health-care workers and border control staff as part and parcel of emergency preparedness.

Infection control workshop

The first two days of the workshop were dedicated to health-care workers (HCWs), who numbered 40 in all including health protection officers, an anaesthetist, staff nurses, nurse practitioners, and laboratory, pharmacy, dental, ambulance and housekeeping staff. The third day was for non-health-sector personnel and border control teams, including animal health-care workers, border control teams, and representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Education Department, Red Cross and other community groups (30 participants).



Mr Tupou Faireka, Acting Secretary of Health, and Dr Seini Kupu, SPC Pandemic Influenza Preparedness Specialist, at the official opening of the workshop.



Participants participated actively in the discussions.



Ms Christelle Lepers making a presentation on the Pacific Public Health Surveillance Network services as the umbrella organisation for PRIPPP.



Mrs Elizabeth Iro, Quality Manager, and Ms Tae Nootutai, Health Inspector, presenting infection control measures and practices in Cook Islands.

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Mrs Margaret Leong, SPC Infection Control Officer, demonstrating hand hygiene practices.



Participants practising hand washing using alcohol hand rub.



Mrs Leong demonstrating how to don and remove personal protective equipment (PPE)



Participants practising correct sequence for donning and removing PPE.



Participants found the practical sessions on hand hygiene and PPE use very helpful.

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Scenario-based group work was organised at the end of each workshop. The scenarios covered important aspects of avian and pandemic influenza preparedness such as timely response, public awareness, disease reporting and rapid containment.



Media coverage of the event was organised during the workshop by SPC/Cook Islands MoH to inform the media and community about pandemic influenza preparedness in Cook Islands.

Drill exercise

A testing exercise was carried out to evaluate the infection control capabilities of the Ministry of Health at the community/village clinic level (Blackrock Clinic), the hospital accident and emergency (A&E) ward, including ambulance services, and the isolation ward.

The scenario was about a suspected pandemic influenza event. Actors at the various locations were briefed on the sequence of the scenario and their role before the drill began.



Actors being briefed before the exercise.



Ability of HCWs to recognise flu-like symptoms in patients at the Community Health Clinic, and to implement proper IC measures (e.g. masking the patient, social distancing) was part of the evaluation.



The 'sick patient' was given a mask and asked to put it on following the procedure described in a wall poster. Meanwhile, HCWs put on their PPE.



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Properly gowned HCW interviewing the patient.



The evaluation team included Cook Islands MoH and SPC staff and an observer from the community.



Aspects of communication were also evaluated. HCW (masked) calls the ambulance while a member of the community observes the exercise.



The ambulance driver and nurse taking proper measures before transporting a very ill flu patient from the Community Health Clinic to the hospital isolation ward.



The patient is transported in the ambulance to the hospital.



Entrance to the isolation room at the hospital.

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The ambulance driver and nurse transferring the patient to the isolation room...



...and following the correct procedure in removing their PPE after leaving the isolation room.



Hand hygiene being practised and evaluated.



The driver disinfecting the ambulance after transferring a highly infectious patient (e.g. with suspected pandemic flu).



A&E staff receiving suspected pandemic flu patients.



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Suspected pandemic flu patients isolated from other patients at A&E.



A very sick suspected pandemic flu patient being transferred to the isolation ward.



Staff in the isolation ward prepare themselves by donning PPE before admitting the suspected highly infectious flu patient.



Completing patient admission procedures before removing PPE.



Housekeeping staff donning PPE before cleaning (sorting out dirty/infected linens and bagging them accordingly).



Debriefing after the exercise.

Conclusion

The drill exercise provided a great opportunity for HCWs from both public and clinical health services to communicate and work closely together. The debriefing session and results of the evaluation carried out during the exercise showed a high standard of infection control capability among HCWs and efficiency in applying the measures needed to protect themselves and their patients.

Recommendations

- Cook Islands should consider continuing to conduct small but focused drills of this nature, especially in Rarotonga.
- Other relevant sectors, such as border control teams, should take part in similar exercises tailored to their workplaces.

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Acknowledgement

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