

Minutes of the consultative meeting with the stakeholders on response to influenza A(H1N1)

Venue: Conference Hall, Ministry of Health

Time: 3.00pm

Chaired by: Offtg. Secretary, MoH

Introduction

His Excellency, Lyonpo Zangley Dukpa, Minister of Health, opened the meeting by welcoming the participants and briefed the forum on the current global situation of Influenza A(H1N1). He informed the forum that a National Pandemic Preparedness Plan was already in place and that the Ministry of Health had initiated activities for the prevention and control of the infection based on the plan.

He stressed on the need for a concerted national response with the cooperation of all agencies to prevent the disease from entering Bhutan.

After his address the Honorable Lyonpo handed over the business session to the officiating Secretary of Health to chair the meeting.

The chairman highlighted the measures being undertaken by MoH to combat the current global outbreak of Influenza A(H1N1).

The Chief Program Officer, Communicable Disease Division, MoH made a presentation on the spread of the outbreak, the National Influenza Pandemic Preparedness Plan, International Health Regulation (2005), and response activities being put in place by health. The presentation also touched on the need of support from other agencies and a coordinated development for strategies which were outside the jurisdiction of health.

Discussion

Most of the issues raised were on the epidemiology of the disease, source of infection, mode of disease spread and severity of the disease. The MoH, with the support of the WHO country Representative, clarified most of the questions raised by the participants. Participants also raised reservations about quarantine measure (if they were adopted) due to the lack of facilities at the airport and the Paro Hospital.

Screening of passengers at all entry points were also felt necessary.

The forum also felt that the media had an important role in disseminating information and creating awareness to the public and preventing general panic. However, it was felt that the media should get credible information for dissemination, i.e., from the Ministry of Health or the World Health organization (WHO).

The participants also felt that agencies like Druk Air Corporation, Department of Civil Aviation, Dept. of Immigration, Dept. of Revenue and Customs, Tourism Council, ABTO (Association of Bhutanese Tour Operators) and others had an important role to play in monitoring travelers and reporting of disease to the Ministry of Health.

ABTO informed the floor that they already held meetings with the Tourism Council of Bhutan and other travel agencies in regard to the disease and distributed the information and updates on the disease. They also emphasized the need to have a focal/contact person in health that can help in providing the information/updates of the disease situation and other response activities implemented by health.

Recommendation

Based on the extensive deliberations that was carried out the meeting recommended the following:

1. All the ministries and other agencies should be informed on the updates of the disease situation and the ongoing measure undertaken by health.
2. The Department of Immigration to liaise with the MoH in monitoring incoming travelers/foreigners from affected countries/areas through the visa issuance process.
3. NIPPP should clearly spell out the role relevant stakeholders and their responsibility as per the phases of the disease and disseminate the plan to the stakeholders.
4. Information on the preventive measures placed by the country should be disseminated to the public through different media to avoid public panic. The IEC materials should be immediately produced and distributed to the public and to the points of entry/exit.
5. MoH should develop criteria and SoPs for screening the travelers and should be shared with travel agencies, airport, Druk Air and Civil Aviation.
6. Additional health personnel to be deployed in the airport for screening passengers.
7. Passengers/travelers who need medical observation should be kept in designated room/s in the airport rather than keeping them in the hospital. Policy for logistical support for these travelers needs to be clear.
8. Technical Committee should meet immediately to work on the tasks/responses that MoH needs to implement.
9. MoH should improve laboratory capacity for confirmation of this disease.
10. Participants who attended this meeting will be the focal/contact person for their concerned ministry/agency. Information on updates of disease and response activities will be emailed to these contact persons. They should also keep the continuity of their participation in the next meetings.
11. MoH will identify roles/work areas for all the stakeholders in preventing the disease and discuss it in the next meeting with stakeholders.
12. The updated NIPPP needs to be endorsed at the earliest.