

# Report - 9th March 2010

## Swine flu

Dr Meirion Evans is one of three medical epidemiologists at the Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre (CDSC) Wales. The unit is responsible for developing and running surveillance systems in Wales, and supporting UK surveillance. It also provides support for field investigation of outbreaks, training and education of professional colleagues, and providing advice on communicable disease policy and strategy matters to the Welsh Assembly Government. Dr Evans is also a senior lecturer in epidemiology and public health at Cardiff University where his research interests include disease outbreaks, immunisation and respiratory infection.

During the SARS outbreak in 2003, Dr Evans was a member of WHO Expert Teams to visit China, an independent consultant on SARS to the Hong Kong Government, and a member of the Hong Kong SARS Expert Committee that subsequently reviewed the handling of the outbreak.

He currently serves on the DH Scientific Pandemic Influenza Advisory Committee (SPI) and the DH Scientific Advisory Group on Emergencies (SAGE).

## Swine Flu – Pandemic or Panic?

It has been called the fake pandemic. A scare generated to boost the sales of the drug companies. A virus that could not decide if it was the next Spanish flu or just another seasonal flu arrived early. It has led to all sorts of questions about the appropriateness of the response. Did it catch us unawares? Or did we panic?

The lecture will present the epidemiology of the pandemic, how it developed, who was affected, and what was its impact in terms of hospital admissions and deaths. It was not as deadly as we feared but it did kill, causing deaths in healthy young people.

The lecture will also describe and comment on the response. Why are we left with large stocks of antivirals and vaccines? Pandemic plans, it seems, were geared up for the worst. Some people probably got unnecessary antiviral treatment, many who might have benefited did not get their antivirals soon enough. For the first time ever we had a pandemic flu vaccine. But in our desire to offer everyone protection we did not think carefully enough about the logistics of offering vaccination.

Next time we need to be smarter than the virus and ready to respond whatever form the pandemic takes.