

Swine Flu Kills Dozens In Britain

By Jennifer Glasse
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Britain is trying to cope with more than 100,000 new cases of the H1N1 swine flu virus each week. More than four dozen people have died and hundreds are hospitalized. The country's chief medical officer expects the flu to get worse in the autumn, when Britain has its annual flu season.

Joanna Dabrowska was diagnosed with swine flu

"I collapsed in a supermarket when I went shopping," Joanna Dabrowska explains, "and I didn't think it was swine flu at the time. I just thought it was fainting from lack of food, or sheer weakness or exhaustion from work."

But her doctor assessed her symptoms over the phone - headaches, nausea, aching joints, fever. He determined it was indeed swine flu. He prescribed medication that her parents picked up and put through her mailbox.

"I was in quarantine, I couldn't see anyone, except through the window, I really couldn't speak to anybody because I lost my voice by then," Dabrowska recalls.

There are a 100,000 new cases of swine flu a week in England alone - numbers in Scotland and Wales are much lower. Most cases are young or middle aged, and the British government is taking the outbreak very seriously.

It's launched television commercials about what to do if you have any symptoms: "To prevent the spread of flu, when you cough or sneeze, catch it in a clean tissue, bin it, and kill it."

Britain's chief medical officer, Liam Donaldson, is waging a one man public information campaign. He tells VOA because London's an international travel hub and business center, it makes sense that there are so many cases of swine flu here.

Liam Donaldson
Liam Donaldson

"I think we have a lot of traditional travel links with North America so I think the virus was seeded into our country in multiple entry points, so it's not particularly surprising that we've had the surge in cases that we have had," Donaldson said.

The government has setup a nationwide call center and Internet service to diagnose people quickly. If they're believed to have swine flu - they're quarantined in their homes and a friend or relative comes to pick up their medicine. So far, it's taken the strain off the country's health service, but the number of cases are expected to rise.

"We expect that to last a little bit longer, but then in the fall and winter we will see a very big surge, as we have seen in previous pandemics," Donaldson said.

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<http://www.voanews.com/english/2009-08-10-voa28.cfm>

Donaldson expects to get it in time for the flu season. "We will get some vaccine at the beginning of the fall - we won't be able to vaccinate everybody initially, so we'll be identifying priority groups," he states, "but because we had advance contracts for vaccine we'll get very big supplies through the fall and winter."

With some breathing space now scientists and the government hope they'll be ready.