

INFLUENZA: SPREAD BY RAPID TRAVEL

Dear Sir,

The paper by Liang et al provided an interesting case study on adult flu events in Singapore. They reported the time period for the occurrence of influenza (H1N1) in ten travellers. The onset of the flu upon arrival in Singapore in this case study was -7 to 5 days.⁽¹⁾ Lessler et al reported that the median incubation period for influenza A was 1.4 days, with a 95% confidence interval of 1.3–1.5 days.⁽²⁾ Since a few of the patients were in Singapore at least two days before the symptoms occurred, based on the median incubation period, it was likely that they contracted the influenza while in Singapore. It is well established that influenza can be transmitted by three routes: droplet, contact and airborne,⁽³⁾ with the common location of this occurrence being in an indoor environment.⁽⁴⁾ Based on the reported incubation period and reported time of symptoms occurring in this study (mean of 1.4 days), it will be difficult to control an outbreak due to rapid travel. Travellers can easily contract the virus, travel to their destination and then come down with the symptoms. Such a scenario will allow a rapid and efficient communication of the disease. Therefore, it is imperative that preparations be made for a worldwide pandemic of H1N1 this fall/winter. This preparation, as mentioned by Liang et al, must also include healthcare workers. It will be necessary for some locations to carefully consider less conventional practices in patient treatment and prevention,⁽⁵⁾ especially since there can be a large number of cases occurring.

Yours sincerely,

John H Lange

Envirosafe Training and Consultants
PO Box 114022
Pittsburgh
PA 15239
USA
Email: jhlange1@hotmail.com

Luca Cegolon
G Mastrangelo

Department of Environmental Medicine and Public Health
University of Padova
Padua 35128
Italy
Email: giuseppe.mastrangelo@unipd.it

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