

Communicating in a pandemic: New research identifies what we want to know and when

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(PhysOrg.com) -- How much information do people want in the event of an influenza pandemic? When do they want to be told, and who should the information come from?

An independent study published recently in U.K. medical journal *Health Expectations* has found that the Australian public wants plenty of [information](#), delivered promptly, and not by politicians.

The aim of the study was to assess community attitudes towards the dissemination of information in the event of an [influenza pandemic](#) and compare these findings to the Australian national communication strategy.

Twelve people were randomly selected to participate in a citizen's forum. Forum members were briefed by experts in the fields of infection control, [virology](#), ethics and public policy and were then presented with a series of scenarios and questions about how and when pandemic information should be communicated.

Professor in Clinical Ethics at Macquarie University, Professor Wendy Rogers, one of the chief investigators on the project, said the group recommended that detailed and comprehensive information be delivered to the public in a timely manner.

"The bottom line is that people want to know," Professor Rogers said.
"The citizen's forum thought it would be worse if the authorities tried to

protect them by shielding them from potentially alarming information."

Professor Rogers said the forum was surprised about its lack of knowledge on influenza planning and thought that individuals should be armed with knowledge so they can employ preventative measures if necessary.

"The citizen's forum said they would prefer the information not to come from a politician - their preference was for a public policy official or an authority figure held in high esteem."

The study was carried out prior to the outbreak of [swine flu](#) earlier this year and subsequent to the avian [influenza strain](#) which first emerged in 2003. Policymakers in Australia are now being urged to examine the findings of the citizen's forum study when next formulating national strategies around pandemic communication.

Provided by Macquarie University

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