

Australia is prepared for swine flu: AMA

Australia is well prepared to deal with a potentially deadly swine flu outbreak if one occurs, the Australian Medical Association (AMA) says.

The new influenza strain, feared to have killed 86 people in Mexico and infected 20 in the United States, has "pandemic potential", the World Health Organisation has warned.

Meanwhile, the New Zealand government has said 10 local students who had just returned from Mexico have tested positive for influenza A and are believed "likely" to have contracted swine flu.

[Queensland tests negative](#)

AMA president Rosanna Capolingua says while the new virus poses a serious risk, the nation's health system is equipped to deal with it.

"There is certainly communication networks, there is a store of Tamiflu, the antiviral agent, that's been kept in Australia as well," Dr Capolingua told ABC Radio on Monday.

"There's been suggestions of fever tents, how to decamp patients from primary care into isolation areas, how the hospitals would cope.

"There's been quite a lot of planning done in the past and preparation for any of these sorts of circumstances."

[Global alarm as killer swine flu spreads](#)

One of Australia's top influenza experts, virologist Alan Hampson, said while swine flu didn't appear to be as unpredictable as avian flu, it was quite different to regular human influenza viruses. "It is sufficiently different to be able to readily infect people and probably overcome existing immunity to existing H1 viruses," he said.

[Flu closes Mexican soccer stadiums](#)

The disease could already be in Australia, Mr Hampson said.

"It's very hard to screen for influenza coming into the country because what we do know is that people can be infected and not show the signs of disease in the early stages, but can be spreading the disease now," he said.

Federal Health Minister Nicola Roxon has also said that Australia is in a good position to respond to the threat of swine flu.

Ms Roxon said Australia has a stockpile of almost nine million doses of antiviral drugs including Relenza, which has proved to be effective overseas.



"With a situation like this we have to be able to act quickly and Australia is in a very good position to act quickly," Ms Roxon told reporters.

She said the government's crisis health committee was meeting on Monday to decide if new steps, such as screening incoming overseas passengers at airports, will be introduced.

"This is a very serious matter," she said.

"The World Health Organisation has declared it a public health emergency and that means it is of great concern across the world and here in Australia.

"People need to be alert - this is a significant health issue but one that Australia is very well placed to tackle."

Ms Roxon said people travelling overseas, especially to Mexico and North America, should read the updated travel advice on the website of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

She said she has received advice the flu strain that has hit Mexico is not as virulent outside that country.