

# Man with swine flu dies in Adelaide

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A West Australian man has become the first person with swine flu to die in Australia.

The 26-year-old man died in the Royal Adelaide Hospital (RAH) on Friday afternoon after being diagnosed with the virus on Thursday.

South Australian health authorities could not yet confirm whether the man died because of swine flu, as he had been suffering from a number of other serious health conditions.

The man had been transferred from Alice Springs Hospital to the RAH intensive care unit on Monday.

SA Health Minister John Hill said the RAH would continue to investigate the cause of death.

"What we do know is that this man was seriously ill from a number of conditions and the reason he was sent to the Royal Adelaide was because of those conditions," he said.

"How the swine flu interacted with those conditions and what's the ultimate cause of death is something we can't really speculate about."

SA Health's chief medical officer Paddy Phillips said he did not, as of yet, have all the details surrounding the Aboriginal man's death.

"Although the patient was diagnosed as positive for swine flu yesterday, his other medical conditions had dramatically deteriorated by the time he got to Adelaide," Professor Phillips said.

"We will be letting the Commonwealth know exactly whether or not H1N1 was a major contributor or not."

Prof Phillips said WA health authorities and the commonwealth's chief medical adviser had been informed, and that the man's death would not yet be added to the list of casualties from swine flu.

"This is very recent and while we have a large amount of information, we clearly don't have all of the information - that will require further review."

Prof Phillips told reporters on Friday evening the RAH would work with the Communicable Diseases Branch.

He said it was incredibly unlikely the man could have contracted the influenza A (H1N1) virus at the RAH and that staff who treated the man prior to him being diagnosed with swine flu had since been prescribed a course of Tamiflu.

"All of the appropriate procedures have been followed," he said.

"So I think it is incredibly unlikely this was caught in SA.

"Swine flu in the vast majority of people is a mild illness.

"However, we know from overseas experience that a certain proportion of people do get so sick they need to be in hospital and, unfortunately, a certain proportion do ultimately succumb - largely people with pre-existing medical conditions.

"Unfortunately, there is a higher incidence of the illnesses that make people vulnerable to complications from influenza, as well as H1N1, in the Aboriginal population and they tend to get those illnesses - diabetes, lung disease, heart disease, kidney disease - at younger ages."

In a statement released on Friday night, Federal health Minister Nicola Roxon said all governments were focused on minimising the number of cases of serious disease as much as possible.

"During the PROTECT phase announced this week, the government is focused on identifying, targeting and treating those most vulnerable to severe complications from swine flu," Ms Roxon said.

It is understood the man came from a small Aboriginal community about 700km west of Alice Springs.

Prof Phillips would not detail the medical conditions the man was suffering from, except to say they had affected a number of his organ systems.

He said the man's family had been informed of his death.

Late Friday evening, the Commonwealth government joined SA health authorities in offering their condolences to the man's family.

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd says the death is terrible but, unfortunately, it was inevitable there would a fatality in Australia.

"Any person's death is terrible and our thoughts go out to this man's family and, of course, to his friends and his community," Mr Rudd told reporters in Canberra.

"As is the experience in other countries, it was unfortunately inevitable that some cases would experience more severe outcomes and deaths would occur."

Mr Rudd said it was important to remember swine flu was mild in the majority of cases in Australia.