

Second person dies with swine flu in Vic

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Victorian Health Minister Daniel Andrews says a 50-year-old Victorian woman has died from swine flu.

Health authorities have confirmed the death of the third Australian with swine flu while issuing an unreserved apology to the family of a Victorian man who died on the weekend.

A 50-year-old woman suffering from life-threatening bone marrow cancer died in the Peter MacCallum Cancer Institute in Melbourne on Wednesday morning after being admitted with flu-like symptoms on Saturday.

A test on Monday revealed she had the influenza A(H1N1) virus.

Victorian Health Minister Daniel Andrews said the woman was a long-term patient at the cancer hospital but died at 3am (AEST) "as a direct result of the complications of her flu".

Mr Andrews said a second patient diagnosed with swine flu is at the hospital receiving "appropriate care".

The woman is the second Victorian with swine flu to die and follows the death of Anthony Splatt who died on Saturday after being rushed from his home in Colac in western Victoria to Melbourne's Maroondah Hospital.

His parents, Brian and Judith Splatt, said they had become distressed on hearing acting Chief Health Officer Dr Rosemary Lester talk about their son's death to the media without first contacting them.

Dr Lester unreservedly apologised on Wednesday and said she understood the hospital had spoken with the family before she met with the media on Tuesday.

"I am very distressed personally that we have caused this family further distress and I unreservedly apologise for that," she said.

Brian Splatt said he would have expected a call from Dr Lester "out of courtesy" telling them of her plans to face the media.

"The information she gave out, she might as well have identified his name and address - how do you hide something like that in a little town that has the funeral notice in the paper," Mr Splatt told Fairfax Radio.

He said Dr Lester had not spoken to the family and the first he heard that his son had the virus was in a late night phone call from the hospital.

Anthony Splatt also suffered from type 2 diabetes and was obese - conditions which made him vulnerable to adverse affects from the flu.

Dr Lester said Victoria remained in the "protect" phase of its swine flu management in which it focuses on the most vulnerable people, such as the morbidly obese, those with respiratory illnesses and pregnant women.

"We know that for immunosuppressed people, especially those who are being treated for life-threatening cancers, any respiratory illness can seriously compromise their health," Dr Lester said.

She said contacts of both patients in the hospital have been given Tamiflu.

David Charlesworth, head of intensive care at Peter MacCallum Cancer Institute, said the woman's death was not surprising because cancer patients died as a result influenza every year.

He said there was no concern that swine flu would spread through the hospital.

Peter MacCallum Cancer Institute had established a separate high-dependency unit for critical patients without flu to limit the spread of the disease, he said.

Dr Charlesworth said the hospital was treating staff and any patient who may have been in contact with the woman.

A woman from Mildura in Victoria's northwest has been transferred to an Adelaide hospital where she has been diagnosed with swine flu.

Mildura Base Hospital chief executive Dane Huxley said the woman's illness was considered unusual enough to transfer her to the closest metropolitan hospital.

In central Australia, swine flu is spreading rapidly through remote communities, with the Northern Territory now home to 78 infected people, half of whom are indigenous, prompting the Australian Medical Association (AMA) to warn of "many deaths" unless governments take immediate action.

Dr Vicki Krause, from the Centre for Disease Control, said 17 additional cases were confirmed on Tuesday, mostly from remote indigenous communities.

"The majority of cases were recorded in central Australia, including the Warlpiri area, and two were in Darwin," she said.

Six people are currently in hospital with the H1N1 virus, including four adults in Alice Springs Hospital, and adult and a child in Royal Darwin Hospital.

Dr Paul Bauert, from the NT branch of the AMA said: "We all know and we all fear that if this particular flu gets into remote communities and takes a very strong hold, then there will be many deaths".

In central Queensland, a prisoner suspected of carrying the virus has been taken to hospital.

Authorities say the prisoner reported to centre staff at the Capricornia Correctional Centre in Rockhampton on Tuesday with flu-like symptoms.

He was then taken to the on-site medical centre, before being transported under guard to Rockhampton Hospital for tests and treatment.