



*****Media release*****

Researchers to uncover swine flu's secrets

Austin Health is not just at the epicentre of Victoria's swine flu epidemic; it is also at the forefront of research to understand it.

Austin Health researcher Associate Professor Joseph Torresi received a grant of over \$400,000 from the National Health and Medical Research Council last Wednesday to study the epidemiology and virology of the Victorian epidemic.

A/Prof Torresi's research team aims to define the ways that swine flu is presenting clinically and create an algorithm that allows doctors to predict the cases most likely to require further testing and treatment.

"If we can identify influenza cases rapidly it becomes possible to intervene with measures to restrict the spread of the virus in the community and institute prompt investigations and treatment of those most likely to develop severe infections," A/Prof Torresi said.

"We'll also be looking at the nature of the epidemic as it's spread through Melbourne. When someone falls ill, we've seen a high proportion of their close contacts become infected - the virus appears to have a high secondary attack rate and it will be important to establish if this is higher than we see with other types of influenza," A/Prof Torresi said.

The team will look at some of the less obvious factors that lead to more severe disease in some people. The research will also look at people's compliance and behaviour with quarantine measures, the nature of the virus and how it contributes to disease severity and any changes to its resistance to oseltamivir (Tamiflu) over the next few months.

"It's a great deal of work but the flu season will be over by late October, so now is the time to get this important research done," he said.

The study is one of 41 fast-tracked for approval by the NHMRC because they will rapidly benefit Australia and the rest of the world by shaping strategies for responding to next year's flu season.

A/Prof Torresi's research may provide new and important information to update the pandemic influenza plan, better preparing the country for influenza epidemics and pandemics in the future.

His research team includes Austin Health infectious diseases experts Prof Lindsay Grayson and A/Prof Paul Johnson, and researchers from The Alfred, the Northern Hospital, the WHO Collaborating Centre for Reference and Research on Influenza and the Nossal Institute.