

Explaining pandemic flu



Understanding pandemic

- **Epidemic:** serious outbreak in a single community, population or region
- **Pandemic:** epidemic spreading around the world affecting hundreds of thousands of people, across many countries



What is a flu pandemic?

- Flu pandemics are global epidemics of a newly emerged strain of flu (a new influenza **A** subtype)
- Three pandemics in the last century
- Worst killed 20 - 40 million worldwide – more lives lost than during the First World War



What causes pandemic flu?

- Emergence of a new flu virus
- New virus passes easily from person to person
- Few, if any, people have any immunity
- This allows it to spread widely, easily and to cause more serious illness



Who is at risk?

- Everyone is at risk
- Certain groups may be at greater risk of serious illness than others
- Until the virus starts circulating we will not know for sure who is at most risk



Is there a vaccine?

- Because the virus will be new, there will be no vaccine ready to protect against pandemic flu
- A specific vaccine cannot be made until the virus has been identified
- Cannot be predicted in same way as 'ordinary' seasonal flu
- 'Ordinary' flu vaccine or past flu jab will not provide protection



What is influenza?

- An acute illness resulting from infection by an influenza virus
- Highly infectious
- Can spread rapidly from person to person
- Some strains cause more severe illness than others



Symptoms

- Generally of sudden onset
- Fever, headache, aching muscles, severe weakness
- Respiratory symptoms e.g. cough, sore throat, difficulty breathing



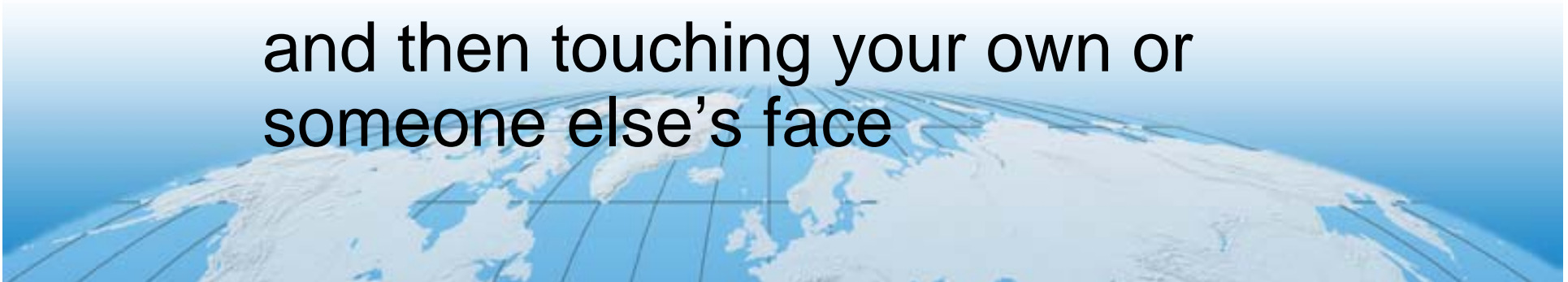
Incubation period of influenza

- Estimates vary
- The range described is from 1 to 4 days
- Most incubation periods are in the range of 2-3 days



How influenza spreads

- Easily passed from person to person through coughing and sneezing
- Transmitted through
 - breathing in droplets containing the virus, produced when infected person talks, coughs or sneezes
 - touching an infected person or surface contaminated with the virus and then touching your own or someone else's face



Lessons from past pandemics

- Occurs unpredictably, not always in winter
- Great variations in mortality, severity of illness and pattern of illness or age most severely affected
- Rapid surge in number of cases over brief period of time, often measured in weeks
- Tend to occur in waves - subsequent waves may be more or less severe

Key lesson – unpredictability

