Reviewer's report

Title: Sources and perceived usefulness of information disseminated to families who entered home quarantine during the H1N1 pandemic in Victoria, Australia: a cross-sectional study

Version: 1 Date: 29 September 2010

Reviewer: Yoko Ibuka

Reviewer's report:

[Major compulsory revisions]
The authors conducted a survey on understanding of and compliance with quarantine recommendation, information sources and their perceived usefulness, and reported descriptive statistics on these measures as well as analyzed the relationship between the compliance and understanding of compliance recommendation, in the context of H1N1 pandemic influenza in 2009. What makes this study interesting to me is the universe of the survey population. The authors identified those who experienced home quarantines through local schools, and provided information that is difficult to obtain through a random sampling survey from a general population. However, as the authors were aware of and mentioned as a limitation, the generalizability of the reported results is very limited due to potential bias caused by the relatively low response. Low response rate itself may not be as crucial if the respondents properly represented the population, but in my opinion it could be critical for this study as non-response may be related to general interests in H1N1 influenza, including attitude towards home quarantine and receptiveness of and sensitivity to information. The bias may affect not only the level of understanding of quarantine recommendation (and compliance), but also responses on the type of information sources and their usefulness, which is the core of the current study.

[Minor essential revisions]
• P4 “However, no published studies have investigated these issues in the context of pH1N1.” At least there are two studies on school closure or compliance with quarantine using Australian data in the context of H1N1 pandemic. I would recommend discussing these studies in either Introduction or Discussion.


• P11 Information sources. To me the distinction between information sources is not very clear. Was there any possibility that respondents received the
information from the health department through one form of media or another? In that case, were respondents supposed to answer both “health department” and “media” as their information sources, or did they just report “media”? Indeed, a European study reported that national and international public health authorities were by far the leading source of information in published articles on H1N1 influenza in the early stage of the pandemic (Duncun 2009).

How the media reported the first days of the pandemic (H1N1) 2009: Results of EU-wide media analysis. B Duncun. Euro Surveillance 2009 July;14(30).

• P12 Relationship between understanding, information and compliance. Was there any respondent who reported full compliance and reported that they did not know what they were meant to do? Understanding the recommendations may seem a necessary condition of compliance.

• P14 “…. most of the schools were located in the Northern Metropolitan Region of Melbourne, an area that has higher levels of disadvantage…” Depending on the size of the population, the population could be a key population in an effective control of an influenza pandemic. This could be even more so if their inclusion in the analysis may lower the estimates of the degree of understanding and perceived usefulness of information sources, as the authors discussed.

[Discretionary revisions]

• P6 Sample: It would be useful to provide the timeline of the survey in accordance with limitation in Discussion.

• P10 “We also used logistic regression, again adjusting for within-school clustering , to examine..” Clarification question. Does this mean that a series of binaries to indicate each one of the schools were included as the independent variables in logistic regression?

• P10 “We postulated that these relationships may be confounded by two variables-….” Has the authors considered the possibility that school characteristics or household’s socio-demographic characteristics besides the two variables mentioned in the text may affect the compliance? For example, compliance may be associated with household size, number of children in home quarantine, or age of child(ren) etc.

• P12 “The five households that did not use any official sources were excluded from this analysis”. This would suit better in Methods section.

Level of interest: An article of limited interest

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests.