Reviewer's report

Title: We should not be complacent about our population-based public health response to the first influenza pandemic of the 21st century

Version: 1 Date: 4 December 2010

Reviewer: Andrea Pugliese

Reviewer’s report:

I found the manuscript quite well written and argued. I wish to add only some minor comments suggesting

Discretionary Revisions:

- The authors cogently argue that border control measures were almost totally ineffective, as had indeed been suggested by natural history of influenza, as well as by modelling studies. One may wonder which was the rationale behind it in national pandemic plans, considering that border controls have been attempted also by several countries that are not as "islands" as Australia.

- School closure. Several other studies beyond [27] exist on modelling school closures. The authors could mention at least Cauchemez S, Valleron AJ, Boelle PY, Flahault A, Ferguson NM. Estimating the impact of school closure on influenza transmission from sentinel data. Nature. 2008;452:750–4 where it is shown that limited school closures cannot interrupt an epidemics, but can delay the peak and, if well timed, decrease peak incidence and somewhat attack rate. The experiences in Japan and Hong Kong cited by the authors show indeed the effectiveness of school closure in temporarily reducing infection transmission, although not necessarily leading to an overall positive effect. I agree with the authors that these experiences should be accurately reviewed, in the planning of more flexible pandemic responses.

- pandemic strain specific influenza. Definitely, the vaccine was available too late to affect infection transmission in Australia. However, because of the timing of the emergence, it was not necessarily too late for several countries in the Northern Hemisphere, especially in Europe, where the infection peaked in November-December or even later. It is indeed plausible that in some countries where vaccine uptake was high (e.g. Germany or Sweden), vaccination has not only protected persons at risk, but also somewhat modulated the size of the wave, although I know of no study demonstrating this. Hence, I find a little too strong the sentence about a pandemic vaccine being necessarily too late with current technologies; this time, it might have had an effect on some countries, although this may due to very lucky circumstances.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

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