

CabinetOffice

Civil Contingencies Secretariat



INTRODUCTORY ADVICE TO STAFF ON PLANNING FOR PANDEMIC INFLUENZA



HM Government

PREPARING FOR EMERGENCIES

**ADVICE FOR BUSINESSES AND OTHER ORGANISATIONS TO HELP
YOU COMMUNICATE WITH YOUR STAFF**

Current advice from the World Health Organisation is that countries should be planning for a possible influenza pandemic, although timing of onset is highly unpredictable. In the event of an influenza pandemic, businesses and other organisations will have a key role to play in reducing the risk to employee's health and safety as far as possible as well as maintaining essential operations.

As part of planning for a possible pandemic, businesses and other organisations may wish to circulate introductory information and advice to their staff to raise awareness about pandemic influenza. To assist you with this key planning activity, the Government has developed the advice below which provides relevant introductory material on pandemic influenza.

If the risk of a possible pandemic were to increase and should one occur, the Government will issue further public health information which businesses and organisations will want to reflect in further information and advice at the time to their staff.

The advice below joins other currently available government guidance and advice for businesses and organisations to assist pandemic influenza planning which can be found at <http://www.ukresilience.info>. In particular 'Guidance on contingency planning for a possible influenza pandemic' and the 'Pandemic influenza checklist for businesses'. General information on an influenza pandemic and the impact it might have, including the UK contingency plan, can be found at <http://www.dh.gov.uk/pandemicflu>.

Cabinet Office
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[This advice was produced by the Cabinet Office in consultation with the Health Departments and with other Government Departments. The Cabinet Office has issued it as part of our role in supporting the Department of Health, as Lead Department, in preparing and planning for a possible influenza pandemic.](#)

INTRODUCTORY ADVICE TO STAFF ON PLANNING FOR PANDEMIC INFLUENZA

Introduction and purpose

As more and more people across the UK and the rest of the world are talking about the possibility of pandemic flu, [we/the company/organisation] thought it would be useful, as your employer, to share some introductory information with you on this important topic. Circulation of this document does **not** mean either an increase in the risk of a pandemic emerging or that a pandemic is necessarily imminent. It is being issued to raise awareness and to keep you informed of the risks and the planning work which is underway. All the information contained in this document is from published sources (listed at end). *[Document note: you may wish to add here whether the advice has been discussed with union or worker representatives in your organisation before wider circulation to staff]*

You may already be aware of currently available public health information on pandemic flu from the NHS (eg, leaflets in GPs surgeries). If the risk of a possible flu pandemic were to increase and should one occur, further public health information will be widely available at the time through the Department of Health and the NHS on how you can protect yourself and your family and what to do if you think you are infected.

In addition, at the onset of a pandemic or when the level of risk increases, [we/the company/organisation] will issue further specific advice and guidance on working practices *[Document note: you may wish to highlight here whether any changes to working practices and/or policies have been or will be discussed with union or worker representatives before they are implemented. You may also wish to comment on which particular issues are being covered in this planning work, such as sickness absence policies; what you have to do when you are ill (e.g. contact arrangements with your workplace); customer contact.]*

Background on pandemic flu

Flu pandemics are not new – there were three during the last century. The World Health Organisation and other international experts have warned that another flu pandemic is both ‘inevitable’ and ‘imminent’, although they cannot predict exactly when it will occur.

Pandemics - global epidemics – occur when a new strain of flu emerges that is markedly different to previously circulating viruses. This means that few – if any – people have immunity, allowing the virus to spread rapidly, affecting hundreds of thousands of people across countries and regions.

Each pandemic is different, and until the virus starts circulating, it is impossible to predict its full effects. However, it is likely to be more serious than ‘ordinary’ flu and may cause illness in a quarter of the population and possibly more¹. A serious pandemic could cause many deaths, disrupt the

¹ Note: the UK Health Departments’ Influenza Pandemic Contingency Plan (October 2005) considers clinical attack rates of 10%, 25% and 50% as possible scenarios.

daily life of many people and cause intense pressure on health and other services.

If a pandemic emerges it will almost certainly reach the UK. Uncertainty about the virus and its impacts is a key challenge for pandemic planning which needs to be flexible as a result. When the virus emerges we will be able to understand it better and be able to fine tune our planning and response policies. Hence, we do not have all the answers now.

In addition to pandemic flu, there are **2 other types of flu**:

Seasonal ('ordinary') flu is caused by viruses circulating in the human population leading to widespread illness each winter (some winters less so than others).

Avian flu – is a contagious disease of animals caused by viruses that normally infect only birds and, less commonly, pigs. While all bird species are thought to be susceptible to infection, domestic poultry flocks are especially vulnerable to infections that can rapidly cause epidemics in poultry. [Note: the H5N1 strain of the avian flu virus, which is currently circulating in wild birds and poultry in some countries, has led to a limited number of human influenza cases but mainly in people who have been in close contact with infected poultry.]

Key planning assumption

During a flu pandemic, the Government's overall aim will be to encourage people to carry on as normal, as far as possible, if they are well, while taking additional precautions to protect themselves from infection and to lessen the risk of spread to others.

In terms of business continuity planning, this means that [we/the company/organisation] are seeking to sustain our functions and services as far as is practicable during a pandemic. [We/the company/organisation] have therefore been considering resilience of our core activities, such as [insert examples relevant to your business], and considerable work has been undertaken/is underway to ensure that our business continuity plans are/will be appropriate for a flu pandemic.

General Advice

When pandemic flu is declared in the UK the general advice from the Government will be to encourage everybody to adopt a common sense approach.

- Continue to come to work unless you are ill.
- If you are ill, stay at home until you feel better. By the time you feel better you are no longer likely to be infectious and can return to work.

As far as it can currently be known, the symptoms of pandemic flu will be the same as for seasonal flu, although more severe, as it is unlikely that people will have any resistance to it.

The Department of Health advises that:

If you do catch flu:

- Stay at home and rest
- Take medicines such as aspirin, ibuprofen or paracetamol to relieve the symptoms (following the instructions with the medicines). Children under 16 must not be given aspirin or ready made flu remedies containing aspirin.
- Drink plenty of fluids

You can reduce, but not eliminate the risk of catching or spreading influenza during a pandemic by:

- Covering your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing, using a tissue when possible
- Disposing of dirty tissues promptly and carefully – bag and bin them
- Avoiding non-essential travel and large crowds wherever possible
- Maintaining good basic hygiene, for example washing your hands frequently with soap and water to reduce the spread of the virus from your hands to your face, or to other people.
- Cleaning hard surfaces (e.g. kitchen worktops, door handles) frequently, using a normal cleaning product
- Making sure your children follow this advice.

These measures are for your own health and to avoid spreading the illness to others.

Further background information on the Government's response to a pandemic

Medical countermeasures

A vaccine specifically to protect against the pandemic influenza virus cannot be made until the pandemic virus has emerged and will not start to be available until 4-6 months later. Even then, it will be a number of months before significant supplies become available. The current planning assumption is that vaccine will become available only after the first wave of the pandemic has passed.

Antiviral drugs are expected to reduce the duration of the illness and the likelihood of complications. These drugs are now being stockpiled to treat those who may become ill. These drugs will be the only major medical countermeasure available in the absence of a specific vaccine

Social measures and travel restrictions. During a pandemic, Government may recommend additional measures on an advisory basis, such as limiting social interactions and any non-essential travel in an attempt to slow down the spread of the virus in the early stages after its arrival in the UK.

