



# Planning for a human influenza pandemic

## Infection Control – how to reduce the spread of pandemic flu

Guidance for schools and early years or childcare settings

Every Child Matters

Change For Children

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department for

**education and skills**

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# INTRODUCTION

## Who is this guidance for?

1. The guidance is designed to assist staff in schools and early years or childcare settings, including Sure Start Children's Centres. It is not aimed at childminders, for whom there is separate guidance, available at:

<http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/humanflupandemic>

2. It is in addition to general guidance on planning for a flu pandemic previously issued by DfES, and available from the same web-page.

3. The guidance focuses on pandemic flu, but much of the advice here would also be good practice for reducing the spread of other viral infections.

## When should this guidance be put into practice?

4. You should read the guidance now and make any preparations that need to be made well in advance of a pandemic. While much of the guidance would not need to be implemented until there is a pandemic, some previous preparation – supplies of materials, raising awareness – will help you be ready to respond to a pandemic.

5. You will be advised by your local authority and through the media if and when the World Health Organization changes the pre-pandemic "phase", the alert level that they use to guide worldwide planning. You should then review your plans.

## Background

6. Influenza (flu) is a familiar infection in the UK, especially in the winter months. The illness caused by the flu virus can be mild or severe, and can at times lead to death. Some groups of people – older people, young children and people with certain health conditions – are generally more susceptible to flu, and each year people in those groups are encouraged to have a flu vaccination.

7. Pandemic flu is different from ordinary flu as it occurs when a new flu virus emerges into the human population and spreads readily and rapidly from person to person worldwide. As it would be a new virus, no-one would have any immunity to it, and there is unlikely to be a suitable vaccine available. Everyone would be susceptible, healthy adults and children as well as those most susceptible to normal 'seasonal' flu. In comparison with seasonal flu, many more people could become severely ill, and many more could die.

8. The circumstances now exist for a new flu virus to emerge and spread worldwide. This could arise from an avian flu ('bird flu') virus mixing with an ordinary human flu virus and becoming able to infect people. Experts advise that a virus with pandemic potential could emerge soon, though this is not certain. People should however start planning now.

Symptoms and spreading the virus

9. The symptoms of influenza are:

Most significant	Other
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fever</li> <li>• Cough and/or shortness of breath</li> <li>• Sudden onset of symptoms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aching muscles</li> <li>• Sore throat</li> <li>• Runny nose, sneezing</li> <li>• Loss of appetite</li> <li>• Headache</li> <li>• Malaise (lethargy, listlessness)</li> <li>• Chills</li> </ul>

Children aged 6 months or less can also have tummy aches, diarrhoea and vomiting. In very young children, tiredness, poor feeding and difficulty in breathing can also be early signs of flu.

10. The symptoms of pandemic flu would probably be similar to those of seasonal flu, but they could be more severe and cause more serious complications. A key message during a pandemic should however be that, in case of doubt, one should assume that an infection is pandemic flu, and act accordingly. It is better that someone stays at home for a couple of days with what might turn out to be a normal cold than that they go into work or school with the early symptoms of pandemic flu and pass the flu virus on to other people.

11. The **incubation period** (the time from being exposed to the virus to showing symptoms of infection) is from one to four days: for most people, it will be 2-3 days.

12. In terms of the **infectious period** (how long you are infectious to others), people are most infectious soon after they develop symptoms, and remain infectious to some extent until the symptoms disappear. In general, adults can continue to excrete viruses for up to five days, and children for up to seven days, but occasionally longer. Over this period, the amount of virus, and therefore the infection risk to others, will decline as symptoms improve, but does not disappear until the symptoms themselves also disappear.

13. Flu, including pandemic flu, is **spread from person to person** by close contact. Some examples of how it may be spread are shown below:

- Infected people can pass the virus to others through large droplets when coughing, sneezing, or even talking within a close distance (one metre or less).
- You can catch the virus by direct contact with an infected person: for example, if you shake or hold their hand, and then touch your own mouth, eyes or nose without first washing your hands.
- You can catch the virus by touching objects (eg door handles, light switches) that have previously been touched by an infected person, then touching your own mouth, eyes or nose without first washing your hands. The virus can survive longer on hard surfaces than on soft or absorbent surfaces.

#### What you can do as an individual

14. Everyone can play their part in helping to reduce the spread of pandemic flu. There are two key things to remember:

- a. Good hygiene practice – wash your hands regularly, particularly after coughing, sneezing or blowing your nose;
- b. If you have flu symptoms (see para 9 above), do not go into work; call your manager. If you become ill at work, inform your manager and go home. If your children show flu symptoms, keep them at home.

#### Advance planning – headteachers and childcare/early years setting managers

15. Most of the guidance focuses on what you and your staff should do in a pandemic, but you should start planning now:

- a. Refresh your lists of contact details for staff and parents/carers;
- b. Review your plans for dealing with above average levels of staff absence;
- c. Ensure that adequate supplies of cleaning materials are readily available (or, if you contract others to provide cleaning services, check that they have contingency plans), and that there are procedures for regular cleaning of hard surfaces;
- d. Ensure that hand hygiene facilities are adequate and working properly; if/when updating or repairing facilities, consider installing automatic or foot-operated taps, dryers and waster bins. Ensure that you have stocks of tissues, paper towels and soaps;

- e. Consider how you might use hand cleansers<sup>1</sup>, for example at the entrances to rooms or sites without hand-washing facilities;
- f. Check that you have procedures for isolating (with appropriate supervision) a child who falls ill during the day until their parents can collect them;
- g. Ensure that your staff are all aware of the relevant procedures and of the infection control guidance below.

### What to do in a pandemic

16. It is possible that the Government will, through local authorities, advise schools and early years and childcare settings to close to children during a pandemic. While your school or setting remains open, you should however follow the advice below.

17. You will almost certainly have had some forewarning of a pandemic before it reaches the UK and your area. At that time, you (headteachers and setting managers) should review your advance planning.

18. You can reduce, but not eliminate, the risk of catching or spreading flu by:

- a. Regular hand-washing;
- b. Minimising contact between your hands and mouth/nose, unless you have just washed your hands;
- c. Covering your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing; use a tissue when possible, then dispose of the tissue promptly and carefully (bag it and bin it);
- d. Encouraging your pupils, or the children in your early years and childcare setting to follow points a-c above.

19. Staff should remain at home if they display any relevant symptoms, or inform their manager and go home if they first display symptoms while at work.

20. Headteachers or setting managers should ensure that hard surfaces (door handles, light switches, taps, kitchen worktops) are cleaned more regularly than usual, using normal cleaning products.

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'hand cleansers' is used in this guidance for a range of cleansers and sanitisers available as gels, handrubs, wipes and sprays. You should follow the manufacturers' guidance on the use of such materials

21. To reduce the spread of infection between children, try to follow the advice below:

- a. (headteachers/setting managers) Ensure that hand hygiene facilities, and facilities for the disposal of tissues, are adequate, accessible, and in working order;
- b. Consider providing hand cleansers for use in the classroom to promote hand hygiene without requiring children to go to a separate wash-room;
- c. (Where possible) Provide an isolation room for use by any child who falls ill during the day until their parents can collect them, and ensure this room is cleaned very regularly; isolate the child (with appropriate supervision) and inform the parents as soon as possible. With parents' agreement, it may be possible for an older child to go home alone, but a child who would normally be mature enough to go home alone may not be able to do so when he or she is unwell;
- d. Remind parents and carers that children displaying flu symptoms should stay at home;
- e. Get children to clean their hands after carpet work; or get them to sit on chairs instead of carpet work (as carpets can cause cross-contamination);
- f. Discourage the sharing of pencils, crayons and pens during a pandemic. Encourage the wiping and cleaning of hands and objects when passing round objects like musical instruments or toys. Because of the difficulty in cleaning soft toys adequately, remove communal soft toys. Do not allow children to share wind instruments;
- g. Avoid bringing children together in large crowds in enclosed spaces (eg whole-school assemblies).

#### Looking after a child who falls ill while in school/childcare setting

22. You should nominate a member of staff to look after the child in the isolation room, with the door to the room left open.

23. The member of staff should not sit/stay within one metre of the child unless the child needs assistance in which case the member of staff should wear a disposable apron and surgical face mask (which constitute 'personal protective equipment', or PPE). Gloves are not essential, though wearing gloves might be useful to remind the member of staff not to touch their own face during contact with the child. They are however no substitute for hand-cleansing, which should be carried out frequently, and always before and after contact with a symptomatic child.

24. It would be desirable for the child to wear a surgical mask, but that may be impractical.

25. In order to minimise the risk to colleagues from used PPE, it is essential that PPE is removed in a standard manner. To begin with, you should remove the apron, and then remove the surgical mask from your face, avoiding touching the front of the mask (by using the tapes). If you have worn gloves, you should remove them first, by turning them inside out in one single motion, then remove the apron and the mask.

26. All used PPE should be placed in a specific labelled dustbin that has a lid, and needs to be disposed of as clinical/infectious waste. After disposing of the PPE in the bin, you must wash your hands with soap and water, or hand cleansers if soap and water are not available.

27. Staff would need to be trained in the use of PPE. The Department of Health is developing training materials for this purpose.

28. When the child has gone home, make sure that the isolation room is cleaned before its next use – with warm water and detergent, a normal household cleaning product or disinfectant.

#### Getting the right messages to children

29. You should teach and encourage children in an age-appropriate way to follow the advice on personal hygiene (hand-washing, minimising contact between hands and mouth/nose, use of tissues). You should emphasise that this is serious, and not a fit subject for joking, but take care not to scare younger or impressionable children.

30. We recognise that it is not possible for staff to monitor that every child is following the advice all of the time, but frequent reminders should help to spread the right messages.

31. We recommend that staff make use of the posters on general infection control that the Department of Health has made available in spring 2007. These can help pupils to avoid normal everyday infections as well as in a pandemic. There are posters on hand-washing and on 'coughs and sneezes'; these can be obtained free of charge from [dh@prolog.uk.com](mailto:dh@prolog.uk.com), quoting reference 278819 for the hand-washing poster and 279933 for that on coughs and sneezes. You can see copies of both posters at <http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/humanflupandemic>.

You may also wish to use Annex A to this guidance on how children should avoid spreading lots of germs when coughing or sneezing and wash their hands thoroughly; Annex B provides links to other sources of information.

32. You can also find a summary of this guidance for early years and childcare settings in A3 format at

<http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/humanflupandemic>.

You may find it useful to put this on an office or staffroom wall as a reminder of the key messages.

**Children: how you should cough or sneeze, to avoid spreading lots of germs**

**Cover your cough**

- when you cough or sneeze, cover your nose and mouth with a tissue;
- throw away your tissue, into a proper bag or bin, as soon as you've used it.
- Wash your hands

**Wash your hands frequently:**

On days when you are coughing, sneezing or blowing your nose, frequently wash your hands often with soap and water; or, if you can't use soap and water, use wipes or gels.

See more advice below at: "How to wash and dry your hands".

**Remember:**

***Washing your hands is the single best way that you can help stop spreading germs that cause illness with coughs and sneezes.***

**How to wash and dry your hands with soap and water**

- 1 Wet your hands with warm water, then add soap.
- 2 Rub in the soap, while you count to fifteen. Make sure you rub the soap into:
  - the backs of your hands;
  - the backs of your fingers;
  - your finger-nails;
  - your finger-tips;
  - the skin between your fingers.
- 3 Rinse your hands under running water.
- 4 Dry your hands with a disposable paper towel or a hot-air blower.

[If you are wearing any rings or bracelets, remove them before washing your hands. If you have any cuts or scratches, cover them with a clean dressing]



## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ) AND OTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

### FAQ

Q In a pandemic, what should cleaning staff clean, and how?

A They should clean surfaces that are frequently touched by hand, using normal cleaning materials.

As far as possible, you should suspend the use of communal items during the pandemic, especially those prone to frequent hand and mouth contact (eg wind instruments) and soft toys, which are hard to clean adequately.

As the cleaning procedures in a pandemic are more extensive than in normal circumstances, other support staff and caretakers may be able to assist cleaning staff.

Q What about protective equipment?

A We do not recommend protective equipment or clothing for staff in schools or early years and childcare settings in a pandemic, except for those who supervise a sick child (see paras 22ff of infection control guidance).

Q Will DfES provide extra funding for hand cleansers, paper tissues etc?

A No. DfES is not imposing this as a requirement, and it relates only to a human flu pandemic, not to a normal winter. We believe schools and settings should be able to afford sensible measures under normal budgets.

### Other guidance or sources of information

Government advice on personal hygiene education and general advice for young people: [www.wiredforhealth.gov.uk/cat.php?catid=838](http://www.wiredforhealth.gov.uk/cat.php?catid=838)

General guidance on infection control, including personal hygiene and seasonal influenza: [www.wiredforhealth.gov.uk/cat.php?catid=917](http://www.wiredforhealth.gov.uk/cat.php?catid=917) .

Curriculum: Citizenship guidance:

[www.nc.uk.net/webdav/harmonise?Page/@id=6004&Subject/@id=4164](http://www.nc.uk.net/webdav/harmonise?Page/@id=6004&Subject/@id=4164) .

See also QCA Citizenship scheme of work guidance for KS1-4.

Planning guidance for schools and early years and childcare providers:

<http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/humanflupandemic>

**Feedback Form for Users of Infection Control Guidance (ICG)**

Please send any tips or advice which you believe would improve this ICG.

The ICG will be reviewed, and where necessary updated, every 6-12 months, depending on developments and research. If you would like to include a suggestion for consideration, please submit it by sending this page to the address below, or an email to [neil.remsbery@dfes.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:neil.remsbery@dfes.gsi.gov.uk). We will acknowledge all suggestions, though may not comment on the suggestion until we are conducting the next review.

Name:

Organisation:

Contact details (phone/e-mail):

Comments/suggestions:

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