

(Swine) Flu Pandemic Policy and information

The UK is familiar with flu, particularly during the winter months. The illness caused by the flu virus can range from mild to severe, and occasionally can lead to death. There are some groups of people that are more susceptible, especially vulnerable people with weaker immune systems, more detail of which is given below under 'Vulnerable Groups'.

A pandemic is a worldwide epidemic. Pandemic flu is different to seasonal flu because it is spread worldwide, being spread from person to person because it is a new virus and most people will be susceptible, not having built up an immunity.

No site that operates under the Hadland Care Group will be closing unless the Department for Health recommends that we do. This is because the virus has now reached the wider community. You may want to apply to your local GP for protection against swine flu for yourselves and your children/family member. All staff are recommended to contact their local GP for advice and protection also, as a precaution.

The contact details are contained later within this policy.

Please read through this policy and separate risk assessment document so that you are familiar with its contents. Please contact Head Office/NHS Direct/your GP should you have any further questions.

Signs and Symptoms of flu

The most significant symptoms of flu are the sudden onset of:

- Fever (high temperature over 38°C)
- Cough or shortness of breath

Other symptoms may include:

- Headache
- Tiredness
- Chills
- Aching muscles
- Limb or joint pain
- Sore throat
- Runny nose

- Sneezing
- Loss of appetite
- diarrhoea or stomach upset

If you feel unwell ...

If you have flu-like symptoms and have access to the internet please refer to the NHS Direct site (www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk) and use the swine flu symptom checker. If you are still concerned, stay at home and call your GP, who will be able to provide a diagnosis over the phone.

If swine flu is confirmed, ask a healthy friend or relative to visit your GP to pick up a document entitling you to antiviral medication. They will then need to pick the medication up at a collection point your GP will advise on (a local pharmacy or similar).

In the meantime, take paracetamol-based cold remedies to reduce fever and other symptoms, drink plenty of fluids and get lots of rest.

If an employee feels ill with flu like symptoms whilst at work it is important that they do not carry on working. Their symptoms should be reported to their Manager straight away, if they are consistent with flu, they should be sent home.

They should contact NHS Direct by telephone on 0845 46 47 or via their website on www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk or your GP.

The Government has also set up a Helpline number

Tel: 0800 1 513 100
Minicom: 0800 1 513 200

Symptoms can be assessed via the Government website by following www.direct.gov/swineflu and if relevant an authorisation number will be provided which can then be used by a 'Flu Friend' to collect anti-virals from an Antiviral Collection Point.

If you develop symptoms while you are not working you should:

- Stay at home
- Tell your Manager
- Contact any of the above for advice
- Do not go to work until you are fully recovered and not showing any symptoms

Incubation period

The incubation period or the time between contact with the virus and the start of symptoms can range from one to four days, though for most people this is between two to three days.

People are most infectious soon after they develop the symptoms. They can continue to spread the virus, by coughing and sneezing, for up to five days (seven days for children). As symptoms subside people become less infectious. The more severe the symptoms, the more infectious the person is likely to be. Once symptoms have gone they are considered no longer infectious to others.

Most people who have contracted swine flu recover within a week, and do not suffer from complications, even if they haven't received anti-viral medication.

Vulnerable people

Continuing studies of the virus by scientists indicates that there may be some groups that are more at risk than others. These include those over 65 years of age, children under 5 years, young persons between the age of 5 and 14 years of age, pregnant women and those with certain long term medical conditions such as:-

- people with:
 - chronic lung disease
 - chronic heart disease
 - chronic kidney disease
 - chronic liver disease
 - chronic neurological disease (neurological disorders include motor neurone disease, multiple sclerosis and Parkinson's disease)
 - immunosuppression (whether caused by disease or treatment) and
 - diabetes mellitus
- patients who have had drug treatment for asthma within the past three years

It is important that if anyone who falls in the above list is confirmed as having swine flu that they start taking anti-viral medication as soon as possible.

How is the virus spread?

The virus can spread from person to person by close contact. Some examples are:

- Large droplets from coughing or sneezing by an infected person close by (usually within one metre)
- Touching or shaking hands with an infected person and then touching your own mouth, eyes or nose without first washing your hands
- Touching surfaces or objects (eg door handles) that have been touched by somebody with flu and then touching your mouth, eyes or nose without first washing your hands

Until a person has acquired immunity, either through natural infection or through vaccination they remain at risk.

How can I protect myself and others?

- Use a tissue to cover both your nose and mouth when coughing and/or sneezing. Throw the tissue away immediately and wash your hands (try not to touch too much)
- Tissues can be thrown in the bin and do not need to be disposed of in a special way
- Do not use cloth hankies or reuse tissues as this spreads the virus to pockets and handbags which can then re-contaminate hands
- Wash your hands frequently, especially after coughing, sneezing and using tissues. Soap and water is effective. If using alcohol hand rub try to use soap and water after the second use
- Try to avoid touching your mouth, eyes and nose unless you have recently cleaned your hands
- Deep clean area frequently touched by hands using normal household detergent and water
- Wash your hands as soon as you get to work and as soon as you arrive home

Being prepared as a business

The flu pandemic is hitting both employers and employees severely and is unable to be contained. The focus is to try to manage the outbreak. To address this risk we will be monitoring the situation very closely, paying particular attention to the Government and World Health Organisation advice.

We will determine what the basic requirements of the business are without which it is unable to function. Statutory ratios need to be adhered to at the Day Nurseries, and a minimum of 1 member of staff per 8 residents at the Care Home, and 2 staff overnight. Pay

roll needs to run during pay days, and at least one person at Head Office is needed to man the phones. Monthly returns for Aspire training are key requirements and back up for office administration will be considered and implemented as necessary.

The workforce is likely to become depleted during an outbreak so attention will be focused on critical areas first. There may be areas whereby appropriate training could be given to remaining workers to help with unfamiliar tasks. Basic tasks are recorded within a policy that is easy to follow, support is always available from Head Office and/or other Care Homes and Nurseries.

There could be a possibility of hiring and training additional temporary staff to cover the shortfall of workers. It is anticipated that due to our apprenticeship scheme and the support system from other nurseries this is unlikely. However, it will be borne in mind that pregnant workers are more at risk and should not be substituted into inappropriate work should the situation arise.

There will be an open flow of information that will flow to employees, parents and family members and other customers/suppliers. Consideration will be given to setting up an emergency communications plan which identifies key contacts and sets up a flow chart of communications so key people can be identified quickly and easily (or possibly further as close contact is likely). Those who are second and third in command are identified should a Manager become ill.

There is already a system in place as Supervisors are able to act up, get step up pay, and this is already detailed on their job descriptions. Be clear who has authority and can take action. Share your critical activity list so that your staff know what must be done and who is best to do it. The Nursery Manager and Administrator provide back up for each other, plus Head Office will also provide support if both Nursery Manager and Administrator are off together. Care staff and Nursery staff are already used to backing each other up and all Managers have 'Buddies'. Health and Safety back up is provided by the Managing Director and Operations Director.

Redundancies will not be considered as an option due to loss of business

Workplace etiquette will also need to be managed and all staff should be reminded of this by their colleagues. A colleague who coughs or sneezes without the use of a hankie or tissue could potentially be spreading infection.

Employ deep cleaning procedures on door handles, taps and light switches etc whenever possible, with a minimum of three times a day – pre and post opening and before lunchtime. Additional cleansing should be done as time allows.

The advice from the Health and Safety Executive is to continue to use air conditioning units if installed in the workplace.

Refunds for customers

Unfortunately there are no refunds given for swine flu.

Staff Sickness

Advise staff to stay at home if they are sick. Bear in mind that if your staff use public transport to come in that these services too may be affected by the outbreak and may be running at reduced service levels. Consider the appropriate technology to enable staff to be able to work from home if appropriate.

Ensure that proper consultation and communication is deployed. If a member of staff or child at your place of work contracts a flu like illness please notify Head Office who will be keeping records of this.

Consider that staff members may need time off to care for a family member that may have contracted the illness, for a child whose school has been closed or if they are a 'flu-buddy'. Even if they are not showing symptoms these carers may already be infected and spreading the virus. This will require a flexibility of hours and/or work location and consideration as to how these people are reintegrated back into the workforce after being ill or caring for relatives.

Some employees may see this as an opportunity to take a 'sickie' for some time off or that their fears over contracting the virus affect them coming to work. Legally employees are not entitled to refuse to come into work on the basis of these fears, but this might outweigh the concern of disciplinary procedure.

Staff are able to self-certify themselves for a period of up to five days. In cases where further complications are evident this will be assessed on an individual basis and further doctor's advice should be sought.

Signed:



by Cheryl Hadland on behalf of the Hadland Care Group