

Planning for a human influenza pandemic

Summary Guidance to schools

Every Child Matters

Change For Children

department for

education and skills

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NOTE: This brief guidance is to assist head teachers and governors of maintained schools, and proprietors of independent schools, in planning for a human flu pandemic. More detailed guidance for schools, local authorities, and providers of children's services is on www.teachernet.gov.uk/humanflupandemic

Is there a serious risk of a flu pandemic, and what impact could it have?

Experts advise that a further flu pandemic is inevitable, but cannot say when it will happen. When it happens, we expect it to spread rapidly to all areas of the UK and have a significant impact. Depending on the severity of the pandemic, 25-50% of the population may become ill at some stage during one or more waves, each lasting 3-4 months, and 50,000 – 700,000 more people than usual may die.

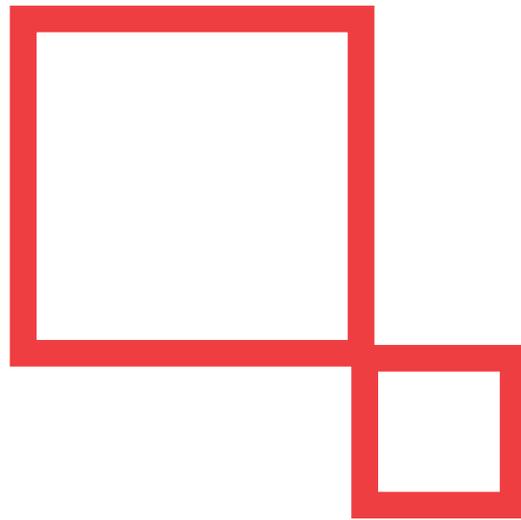
Why are DfES issuing guidance now?

Following the publication of an overall Government contingency plan in 2005, all Departments are making contingency plans with their sectors and helping their delivery partners to do so.

What are the roles of Central Government, local authorities and schools?

Central Government has overall responsibility for contingency planning, is responsible for national policy decisions (and communicating those to relevant partners) and the overall co-ordination of activities during a pandemic. Local authorities and other front-line emergency responders (eg police, NHS) must work in partnership to build their local preparedness; in a pandemic these would work together in Strategic Co-ordinating Groups to co-ordinate activities in an area. Local authorities should also communicate information from Central Government to schools and others – all schools, not just maintained schools.

Schools should prepare plans for a flu pandemic as part of their general emergency planning **and ensure these are shared with staff and, as appropriate, parents.** School managers (normally the head teacher if the governing body delegates this to the head) would make the final decision on whether to close a school during a pandemic.



Do you expect schools to close during a pandemic?

The general advice to all sectors is that they should seek to continue operating as normally as possible during a pandemic – but should plan for much higher than usual levels of staff absence and the consequences of this, as well as for other possible disruption resulting from the pandemic’s impact on other services.

However, schools (and childcare settings) are potentially different from other settings. Children are highly efficient ‘spreaders’ of respiratory infections, both among themselves and to adults in their families. There is some evidence that such infections spread less among children in holiday periods than in term-time. So, closing schools and childcare settings for a period might significantly reduce the number of children infected.

We will not know until nearer the time, when we know more about the nature of a pandemic strain of virus, and children’s vulnerability to it, whether the Government will advise schools and childcare settings to close to pupils for a period during a pandemic, but it is a possibility. Any such advice would affect each region only when the pandemic reached it, based on central guidance about when to close and re-open, but it is very likely that all areas would be affected at some stage. **Schools should therefore plan both for remaining open during a pandemic and for possible closure.**

What should staff do if schools close to pupils?

In line with workers in all other sectors, staff should come into school, unless ill, caring for dependants or authorised to work elsewhere.

What does my school have to do now, during a pandemic and in between?

Your current emergency planning may already cover some or all of these points, but you should now ensure that you have written plans that:

- Make it clear who would take the decision whether to close a school – either because of Government advice that schools in an area should close, or because of reasons specific to

the school (eg too many staff off ill);

- Ensure you have up-to-date contact details for staff and parents;
- Enable you to keep a sick child separate from other pupils (and minimise their contact with staff) until you can get him or her home or collected by parents;
- Ensure that you are able to remain open, if appropriate – your plans should include systems to minimise the spread of infection if the school remains open during a pandemic, eg hand-washing, disposal of tissues etc.

We are developing a model plan that you will be able to amend to meet your needs.

It is important to ensure that all your staff are familiar with the plan and that you also consider what it would be helpful to share with parents at this stage.

Between now and a pandemic you should review plans regularly, and in the light of any further advice from the Government or your LA. You may also wish to test parts of your plan.

Your local authority will inform you when a pandemic is imminent, according to the World Health Organisation. At this stage you should review plans again, check that you have necessary supplies, and remind staff of key information – such as that they should not come into work if they have any flu-like symptoms (sudden onset of fever, headache, muscle pains and feeling ill, with or without sore throat, cough or difficulty breathing).

In a pandemic, while your school remains open, you should

- Take hygiene measures to reduce the risk of infection spreading;
- Ensure that staff showing any signs of infection go home;
- Ensure that children showing signs of infection are taken home or collected by parents
- Provide any information requested by your LA (eg absence rates).

Who will advise on what and how will we be informed?

Central Government will advise whether schools in affected areas should stay open or close, on the basis of scientific advice. If the government were to advise closure, LAs would communicate the message to schools, but schools would not close at that point. LAs – acting on local health information – would inform schools when their area is affected and the advice to close applies.

The decision on whether to close at that time remains with the school – normally the governing body would delegate that power to the head. The head would also usually decide whether a school should close for other reasons (eg lack of staff).

If there is advice to close all schools in an area, the LA would tell schools when this advice will be reviewed; after such a review, the LA would advise schools whether to remain closed or to re-open and, if they are to re-open, whether any specific conditions should apply.

If schools close, is there a duty to provide alternative education?

Local authorities have a duty to provide education for children of compulsory school age who are out of school. Schools would remain open to staff, who could set and mark work, but getting it to and from pupils is an issue that will have to be addressed. We are looking into whether and how DfES can advise or assist local authorities, and will provide more guidance later this year.

Do any special considerations apply to 6th form colleges, school 6th forms, boarding schools or special schools?

In line with advice to FE colleges, we would expect 6th form colleges to remain open as far as possible. Where secondary schools have a 6th form, if there is general advice to close this would apply to classes up to Y11; unless specific local issues make it impractical to do so, we would expect the school to remain open to 6th formers and provide lessons to them.

Boarding schools should check guardianship arrangements for children whose parents are abroad. Their plans should also cover how to provide accommodation in small 'family-type' units for pupils who could not return home, or to a guardian.

As some children in special schools, particularly residential special schools, will have complex needs that can be met better in those schools than elsewhere, schools should – when planning – take advice from social care and health professionals and decide, on the basis of the child's overall well-being, whether the disruption of keeping the child out of school outweighs the increased risk of infection within school.

Can we expect more guidance from DfES?

We will review this guidance, and the fuller guidance regularly, and advise you of any changes. We also expect to issue guidance on infection control later in 2006, as well as more information on the possible provision of remote learning.

You can download this publication online at
www.teachernet.gov.uk/humanflupandemic

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STERL/0706/WEB

Produced by the Department for Education and Skills