



PANDEMIC FLU

Guidance for infection control in residential settings for children and vulnerable young people

PLANNING FOR A HUMAN INFLUENZA PANDEMIC:

INFECTION CONTROL HOW TO REDUCE THE SPREAD OF PANDEMIC FLU

Guidance for residential settings for children and vulnerable young people

Introduction

Who is this guidance for?

1. The guidance is designed to assist staff in residential settings for children, boarding schools, secondary schools with hostels, residential special schools and children's homes. It may also assist staff in specialist colleges and residential settings for vulnerable young people.
2. It is in addition to general guidance on planning for a flu pandemic previously issued by the Scottish Government, and available at: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/PandemicFlu>
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 preparations that need to be made well in advance of a pandemic. While much of the guidance would not be implemented until there is a pandemic, some previous preparation, such as supplies of materials and raising awareness will help you be ready to respond to a pandemic.

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

Guidance

What is Pandemic Influenza (Flu)?

5. Flu is a familiar infection in Scotland, 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.
6. Pandemic flu differs from ordinary flu occurring when a new flu virus emerges into the human population spreading readily and rapidly from person to person worldwide. There were three pandemics during the past century in 1918-19, 1957 and 1968.

7. As it will be a new virus, the entire population will be susceptible because nobody will have immunity to it. Therefore healthy adults as well as the elderly, young children and people with existing medical conditions will be affected. The lack of immunity in the Scottish (and UK) population will mean that the virus has the potential to spread very quickly between people. In comparison with seasonal flu, many more people could become severely ill and many more could die.

8. Experts advise that a virus with pandemic potential could emerge soon, though this is not certain. People should however start planning **now**.

What are the signs and symptoms of influenza?

9. You should familiarise yourself with the signs and symptoms of flu. Looking out for the onset of influenza for yourself and the children in your care can help decide what action to take. The symptoms of influenza are:

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

10. Children aged six months or younger 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.

11. 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, 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 go into work or school with the early symptoms of pandemic flu and pass the flu virus on to others.

12. 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 two to three days.

13. 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 spread flu virus 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 have disappeared.

14. 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 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.
- Influenza viruses can survive for some time in the environment, for example on hard surfaces, (e.g. stainless steel counters or a plastic washing-up bowl) for up to 72 hours. In contrast, soft porous items (e.g. clothes, curtains, seat cushions, tissues, magazines etc.) the virus is transferable for about 24 hours.
- Flu virus could be transferred to hands from hard surfaces for up to 24 hours after the surface has been contaminated and from soft items for up to two hours after, albeit in very low quantities after 15 minutes. On this basis it may be possible to catch the virus by touching objects that have previously been touched by an infected person, then touching your own mouth, eyes or nose without first washing your hands.

What you can do as an individual

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

- Good hygiene practice – wash your hands regularly, particularly after coughing, sneezing or blowing your nose.
- If you have flu symptoms (see paragraph 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.

Context – the likely impact of pandemic flu on schools and residential settings

16. In order to reduce the spread of infection among children, and thus the number of children infected (and corresponding child deaths), the Scottish Government may, through local authorities, advise schools and early years settings to close to children during a pandemic. Any such decision will be based on information about the severity of the pandemic and the level of risk to children. More details can be found in the general guidance on planning for a pandemic at <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/PandemicFlu>

17. In the event of the Scottish Government issuing such advice to schools and early years settings, there may however be exceptions:

- While the advice to close would apply to boarding schools, some children may not be able to return to parents or guardians, so their school might

have to continue to accommodate them, even if other children returned to their families and the school suspended most of its activities.

- Children's homes would be expected to continue to operate, including some that are also registered as schools.
- Some children may be in secure accommodation because of an 'Order' from a Sheriff. This could be an order regarding secure accommodation services, or the Children's Hearings system regarding special schools or care homes. In these cases the placing authority social work staff must be consulted before any decision to close is made as the local authority will require to consider what is in the best interests of the young person.
- In residential special schools, decisions should be taken on the basis of the overall wellbeing of the individual children and young people. We would expect different types of residential special schools to be affected in different ways. For example, it is likely that a school providing accommodation for children with moderate needs would be in a similar position to a mainstream boarding school and most pupils would return home. A school providing long-term accommodation for children with more severe or complex needs may find that it is more appropriate for children to remain in the school where their overall needs can best be met.

18. Some residential settings are therefore more likely than day schools to continue to provide a service through a pandemic. It is therefore particularly important that you have plans that enable you to function safely and reduce the risk to children and staff in your care.

19. The closure of day schools and early years settings may have a further impact on residential settings as staff who are also parents may need or wish to stay at home to look after their own children. This could mean staff absence additional to the absence of members of staff who are themselves sick or looking after sick dependants.

20. The number of staff who would be absent would depend on the severity of the pandemic, their family responsibilities and other factors. In a severe pandemic, at the peak (which might last two weeks) the latest advice from health professionals is that organisations might have up to 30% of staff absent for their own or family illness, as well as any absent looking after children because of school/childcare closures.

Advance planning – headteachers, school proprietors and home managers

21. While much of this guidance focuses on what you should do during a pandemic, there are things that you can do in preparation before then, beginning now:

- Refresh your lists of contacts: staff, parents/carers (including emergency contacts) and contacts in placing authorities.

- Review your plans for dealing with potentially high levels of staff absence (see information on staff absence in paragraphs 20-21).
- (Boarding schools) Check the guardianship arrangements for children who would not be able to return to their families in the event of closure of the school; keep these up-to-date. It will help your planning if you have a good estimate of the number of children you may need to accommodate.
- (Residential special schools) you should liaise with placing authorities on the education and care requirements of the children placed with you; agree how you will determine what would be in the best interests of the child if the Scottish Government advises most schools to close.
- Consider the personal protective equipment (PPE) that staff may need when caring for a child with pandemic flu (see paragraphs 22 below). Ensure you obtain and maintain adequate stocks of the necessary items.
- 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 and frequently touched surfaces.
- 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 waste bins. Ensure that you have stocks of tissues, paper towels and liquid soaps.
- Consider how you might use hand cleansers¹, for example at the entrances to rooms or sites without hand-washing facilities.
- Check that you have procedures for isolating and caring for a child who falls ill and for obtaining / administering relevant treatment.
- Ensure that your staff are aware of the relevant procedures and of the infection control guidance below.

Personal protective equipment

22. Members of staff who look after a child with flu should not sit/stay within one meter 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” (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, with liquid soap and water, which should be carried out frequently, and always before and after contact with a symptomatic child.**

¹ The term ‘hand cleansers’ is used in this guidance for a range of cleansers and sanitisers available as alcohol gels / handrubs, (which are the preferred choice) wipes and sprays. You should follow the manufacturers’ guidance on the use of such materials.

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

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

25. All used PPE should be placed in a specific labelled bin 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 liquid soap and water, or hand cleansers if liquid soap and water are not available. Staff would need to be trained in the use of PPE. Health Protection Scotland's Model Policies on Standard Infection Control Precautions, which includes a specific policy on PPE that may be useful is available at: hps.scot.nhs.uk/infection-control-policies

26. Staff sometimes have to provide care for children with ongoing medical needs (not connected to pandemic flu). They should continue to do this, but should take the precautions outlined above if the child has symptoms of flu.

What to do in a pandemic

27. You will almost certainly have had some forewarning of a pandemic before it reaches Scotland and your area. At that time, you (headteachers/principals and managers) should review advance planning.

28. You will be advised by your local authority of any Scottish Government advice around school closures and how it might affect you. **If the Scottish Government does not advise schools to close**, you should try to function as normally as possible, but follow the advice set out below. Children's homes would be expected to continue operating anyway, so should follow the advice below.

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

- Regular hand-washing with liquid soap and water.
- Minimising contact between your hands, mouth and nose, unless you have just washed your hands.
- 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**.
- Encouraging the children and young people to follow the points above.

30. 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.

31. Headteachers, principals or managers should ensure that hard surfaces

(door handles, light switches, taps, kitchen worktops etc) are cleaned more regularly than usual, using normal cleaning products.

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

- (Headteachers/principals/managers) Ensure that hand hygiene facilities, and facilities for the disposal of tissues are adequate, accessible, and in working order.
- Consider providing hand cleansers in rooms without washbasins to promote hand-washing without requiring children to go to a separate wash-room.
- Ensure that you can isolate any child who falls ill by separating them from other children to avoid a possible spread of infection. Ideally this should be in a separate room providing the child with adequate supervision and care. You should also advise the child's parents / carers (or guardian when the parents are abroad), but we would not generally advise trying to get a sick child back to their family home.
- Remind parents and carers that children displaying flu symptoms while at home (weekends and holidays) should stay at home and not return to school or college until all flu symptoms have disappeared.
- Discourage the sharing of pencils, crayons and pens during a pandemic.
- Encourage the wiping and cleaning of hands and items 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.
- Avoid bringing children together in large crowds in enclosed spaces (e.g. whole-school assemblies).
- Health Protection Scotland has provided model Infection control Guidance which you may find useful.
<http://www.hps.scot.nhs.uk/haic/ic/modelinfectioncontrolpolicies.aspx>

33. Children's homes will generally be accommodating relatively small numbers of children. It would not be realistic – nor good for children's emotional well being – to try to isolate them from one another; one would not advise parents to keep their children apart. The only exception would be the need to isolate a child displaying flu symptoms.

34. **If the Scottish Government has advised schools to close to pupils**, boarding schools and secondary schools with hostels should make arrangements to get pupils back to parents or guardians wherever possible, and to care for those pupils who have to remain in the school. Residential special schools

should agree with placing authorities whether children should remain in the school, or return to their families or local authority provision (see paragraph 17 above).

35. For those children who remain in the school or home, the measures set out above still apply. In a boarding school where most pupils have been able to return to parents or guardians, we would advise the school to try to accommodate the remaining pupils in small groups – the fewer children that a child mixes with, the lower the risk of either catching or spreading an infection. Some level of social mixing would however be necessary for children’s general wellbeing as long as any children with symptoms of flu were isolated from other children. Schools may also wish to support some learning activities, alongside any support for remote learning for pupils who have returned home.

36. If a residential special school finds that most of the pupils remain in the school (for the reasons set out in paragraph 17), it may well be appropriate to continue normal lessons as far as possible, while taking the measures set out above to reduce infection.

Looking after a child who has pandemic flu

37. If a child in your school or home displays any of the symptoms of pandemic flu set out in paragraph 10, you should isolate them from other children. As long as there is any doubt, keep them away from other children.

38. Detailed arrangements for obtaining antiviral drugs will be publicised by the Scottish Government and NHS Scotland prior to a pandemic.

39. If a child does have flu, they should remain isolated from other children until all symptoms have disappeared. We would advise you to keep to a minimum the number of staff who have close contact with the child during their illness. Any member of staff who has contact with a child ill with flu should follow the guidance on using PPE above, and take particular care in washing their hands thoroughly with liquid soap and water before they have any contact with other children.

Getting the correct messages to children

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

41. 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.

42. We recommend that staff make use of posters on general infection control

which are available from [Health Protection Scotland](#). These can help pupils to avoid normal everyday infections as well as during a pandemic. 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** contains links to other sources of information.

43. Health Protection Scotland is currently running a hand hygiene campaign. It has a website which specifically includes information on raising awareness on hand hygiene to children and well as adults.
http://www.washyourhandsofthem.com/campaign/leaflets/hh_lflt_pub2212.pdf

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; - **Bag it and Bin it** and wash your hands with liquid soap and water.

Wash your hands frequently:

On days when you are coughing, sneezing or blowing your nose, wash your hands often with liquid soap and water - or use wipes or gels.

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 liquid soap and water

- 1 Wet your hands with warm water, then add liquid soap.
- 2 Rub in the liquid soap, while you count to 15. Make sure you rub:
 - the backs of your hands and the backs of your fingers
 - your fingernails
 - your fingertips
 - the skin between your fingers
- 3 Rinse your hands under warm running water.
- 4 Dry your hands with a hot-air blower or a disposable paper towel – remembering to throw the used towel in the bin.

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

Scottish Government / HPS 2008.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS AND OTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

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

A They should clean frequently touched surfaces 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 e.g. wind instruments and soft toys, which are hard to clean adequately.
- As 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.

Q Will the Scottish Government provide extra funding for hand cleansers, paper tissues etc?

A No. As this relates only to a human flu pandemic, not to a normal seasonal flu, we believe schools and settings should be able to afford sensible measures under normal budgets.

Other guidance or sources of information

General guidance on infection control, including personal hygiene and seasonal influenza is available from [Health Protection Scotland](#)

Planning guidance for schools and children services in Scotland:
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/07/05121311/0> and summary

Guidance for Schools in Scotland at:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/07/05121221/1>

General guidance on planning for a flu pandemic previously issued by the Scottish Government is at:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/PandemicFlu>

NHS Scotland Infection control website -

<http://www.hps.scot.nhs.uk/haic/ic/modelinfectioncontrolpolicies.aspx>

