



Whitchurch High School - Cardiff

Flu Pandemic Policy (Avian Flu, Swine Flu)

1) Rationale

This policy has been written in response to the real risk of flu pandemic. The school is mindful of the need to ensure it is in a position to respond to any such event but also not to cause unnecessary alarm by the production of such a policy.

The Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) has issued advice to all schools in its document "Pandemic Influenza - Children and Young People Contingency planning for schools and other settings where children are educated".

Appropriate sections of this document are published within this policy.

2) Background

Avian influenza is a disease that affects birds. Wild birds can carry it, though often it does not make them ill. It can therefore be easily transmitted across country borders. A class of viruses causes the disease; the infection caused by the virus sub-type H5N1 is very dangerous to domestic poultry in particular. The disease has reached several European countries.

H5N1 avian influenza is very difficult to transmit from birds to humans, and such transmission has occurred almost entirely within those working closely with poultry. Human to human transmission is virtually unknown. The main worries as far as the UK is concerned are that:-

- The disease reaches the UK, and poultry is affected
- There is bird-man transmission within the poultry industry causing the illness in humans
- The virus H5N1 mutates (probably by infecting a human already infected with one of the human influenza viruses) and the mutated virus is then easily transmissible between humans. There would be no "inbuilt resistance" to such a virus which could, though not necessarily, cause a severe and dangerous "human-type influenza" with a high mortality rate. A pandemic, which occurs from time to time with human influenza, would then be likely.

Swine influenza is a respiratory disease and has some elements of a virus found in pigs.

- There is no evidence of this disease circulating in pigs in the UK. If swine flu is confirmed in a number of countries and spreads from human to human, this could lead to what is referred to as a pandemic flu outbreak.
- The World Health Organization (WHO) closely monitors cases of swine flu and other types of flu globally to see whether these viruses develop into a pandemic.
- The WHO operates a 6 level system of alerts in which level 6 indicates a global pandemic.

3) Likelihood of flu pandemic

1.2 No-one knows when a pandemic will occur. When it does, it may come in two or more waves several months apart. Each wave may last two to three months. If a pandemic flu strain emerges overseas, it will almost certainly reach the UK. While this may take 2-3 weeks there may not be that much forewarning. Once the pandemic arrives, it is likely to spread across the UK in a matter of weeks.

4) Swine Flu and the Symptoms

The symptoms of swine flu are broadly the same as those of ordinary flu, but may be more severe and cause more serious complications.

The typical symptoms are: Sudden fever - sudden cough

Other symptoms may include: Headache - tiredness - chills - aching muscles - limb or joint pain - diarrhoea or stomach upset - sore throat - runny nose - sneezing - loss of appetite

Current Advice: The NHS currently advise that someone who has recently travelled to Mexico and has flu-like symptoms should stay at home and contact either their GP or NHS Direct on 0845 4647.

If a diagnosis of Swine flu has been made please also contact and inform the school.

5) Personal responsibility

1.8 Current government guidance is that people should try to continue their everyday (essential) activities as normally as possible during a pandemic, while taking personal responsibility for self-protection and social responsibility to lessen the spread of the virus.

Staff and pupils are encouraged to note the following general advice, which can help prevent the spread of flu.

- **CATCH IT:** Cover your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing and use a tissue.
- **BIN IT:** Dispose of dirty tissues, bag them and bin them.
- **KILL IT:** Maintain good basic hygiene, wash your hands frequently with soap and water and clean hard surfaces regularly e.g. door handles, phones and worktops.

If you feel you have flu-like symptoms:

- Stay home and rest.
- Take medicines such as aspirin, ibuprofen or paracetamol to relieve the symptoms, although children under 16 should not be given aspirin or flu remedies containing aspirin.
- Drink plenty of fluids.

6) General public health measures affecting schools during a pandemic

The school will follow the best advice given to meet the needs of its community, accepting that the school cannot operate in isolation to public health measures.

1.10 There are some specific issues to consider concerning children. Children are highly efficient 'spreaders' of respiratory infections, both among themselves and to adults in their families, which can lead to a rapid spread of infection when they are together in school or other group settings. There is some evidence that such infections (e.g. seasonal flu) spread less among children during school holidays than in term-time, and indications that closing schools and other settings could reduce the spread of pandemic flu among children, though it may not reduce infection in the adult population as a whole. There may therefore be circumstances in which the Government would advise the closure of schools and group childcare settings during a pandemic.

1.11 We therefore recommend that all services for children plan both for staying open and for closing, for some or all of a pandemic. Closure could either be very localised and brief – for example, a school with too few staff to operate safely – or more widespread and for a longer period, if at the time advice from the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) is that this will reduce the spread of infection among children.”

7) Subsequent waves of pandemic flu

The school will follow medical and public health advice on any subsequent waves of flu pandemic.

1.20 There may be two or more waves in a pandemic, possibly weeks or months apart. Government advice on action to be taken in subsequent waves will depend on information which becomes available after the first wave: for example, which groups were infected in the first wave and whether they would be subsequently immune; and whether a virus-specific vaccine could be developed and produced in time. Depending on such factors, advice could be to remain open and operate normally; close to all pupils; or open for pupils who had been infected but recovered in the first wave. The same channels of communication would be used to provide advice to service providers.

8) School actions

The view of the majority of medical scientists is that a global pandemic of a new flu virus such as avian flu or swine flu is increasingly likely and probably inevitable. In the event of receiving advice from medical/governmental sources that a flu pandemic is imminent, the school will:-

Inform parents promptly of the situation and the school's response;

- Update the school's response regularly in line with the emerging situation
- Use the school's website and other appropriate means to inform parents, so that advice is prompt and easily accessible, including arrangements for any exam candidates
- Act strictly on the generic advice given to the national population by the Chief Medical Officer and appropriate WAG government agencies, such as the Health Protection Agency and LEA.

In preparing for a possible pandemic situation the school will act to:

- Publicise appropriate information and ensure reminders with regard to personal hygiene are on display and announced to pupils
- Check sufficient stocks of cleaning products such as tissues, soaps, detergents and alcohol gels are available for use
- Monitor very closely updates from the Department of Health, Welsh Assembly and Local Government with regard to the possible spread of the pandemic within the local area
- Ensure that staff who show signs of infection are sent home and that pupils showing signs of infection are reassured, collected by their parents, and taken home

Every effort will be made to keep the school operating normally

Daily updates will be posted on the school's website

9) Closure of the school

If the school has to CLOSE then this will be communicated to students and staff first, and then to parents as soon as possible thereafter.

The school may close for students but still be open for staff.

If the school is closed for pupils then it does not have the general duty of care, which it normally has when the school is open in session.

Parents will then be responsible for the safety and care of their children.

The school's website will display

(1) Daily updates on the current status of the pandemic

(2) Arrangements to allow pupils to be able to continue with their academic work

10) Remaining open or Re-opening of the school following closure

The school's website will display information which will cover the arrangements for remaining open or the re-opening of the school following closure. Such decisions will be based on the ability of the school to respond to the advice provided.

Remaining open or re-opening of the school will not necessarily be the same for pupils and staff.

2.1 If there is no advice to close, *schools should* remain open as long as sufficient staff are available to enable operation in a safe manner, provide as near to normal classes and curriculum as resources permit; also to follow advice to minimise the spread of infection among pupils and staff, and seek health protection advice as and when appropriate.

2.6 If all schools in an area close during a pandemic, the situation will be reviewed by the Strategic Coordinating Groups (SCG) after a period of time, (probably 2-3 weeks, but this would be made clear in the advice to close), and the LEA would inform schools of any change in the advice. It is possible that such further advice might be to make some provision available, possibly only for pupils who have had pandemic flu and recovered. Such advice would depend on health protection information.

2.7 When it is considered appropriate for all schools in an area to re-open (work is being undertaken on the indicators that would trigger this), local authorities would be informed would inform schools. Any conditions to be attached to re-opening, or any specific measures to be taken would be communicated at that time.

11) Useful information

Useful sources of further information can be found at the following websites:

Welsh Assembly Government (WAG)

<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/health/protection/communicabledisease/swine/?lang=en>

Department of Health (DH)

<http://www.dh.gov.uk/>,

Health Protection Agency (HPA)

www.hpa.org.uk/infections

Medical Officers of Schools Association (MOSA)

<http://www.mosa.org.uk/>