

23<sup>rd</sup> September 2009

# SWINE FLU

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS: TO ACCOMPANY THE INFORMATION AND ADVICE FOR HIGHER AND FURTHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS ISSUED ON 23<sup>rd</sup> SEPTEMBER 2009**

The World Health Organisation has now moved to Phase 6, which means that swine flu is now technically a global pandemic.

- Government advice is still that the public and business should carry on as normal for as long and as far as possible within the constraints the pandemic imposes, whilst adhering to further government advice, taking sensible precautions and adopting good hygiene measures.
- Higher and Further Education Institutions should continue to operate as normal, while remaining alert to any students, staff or visitors exhibiting flu-like symptoms. They should continue to make their own decisions regarding scaling down operations, with expert advice from their local National Public Health Service Health Protection Teams.

### **People Displaying Flu-like Symptoms**

Anyone who may have flu should be advised to stay at home, rest, drink plenty of fluids and take medication such as paracetamol. People can check their symptoms by calling the Swine Flu Information Line on 0800 1 513 513 or visiting [www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk). For general advice on swine flu people can also contact NHS Direct Wales on 0845 46 47.

If people have underlying health conditions or have worsening or severe symptoms they should call their GP.

People should not go to their GP surgery, A&E, or other healthcare premises as they may pass the infection on to other people who are at a higher risk of complications if they get the virus.

### **Business Continuity**

All Higher and Further Education Institutions are advised urgently to review their business continuity plans to ensure they are prepared for use. More detailed guidance to help with planning and preparation is provided in the attached document 'Guidance on Planning for an Influenza Pandemic'.

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

### **Q. What advice should I give to staff and students?**

- A. Keep staff, students and visitors informed and direct them towards general background information at [www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk) or by calling the National Flu Information line on 0800 1 513 513.

The risk of infection can be reduced significantly by ensuring good standards of personal hygiene, so remind staff, students and visitors of good hygiene practice advice at every opportunity, including:

- Washing hands frequently with soap and water to reduce the spread of virus from your hands to your face or to other people;
- Covering your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing;
- Using a tissue if possible, and disposing of it promptly and carefully after use;
- Cleaning hard surfaces (such as door handles) frequently using a normal cleaning product.

The Catch it, Bin It, Kill It campaign aims to encourage good hygiene. To find out more about 'Catch it, Bin it, Kill it' and download / order posters, visit

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

### **Q. What should we consider in our business continuity plan?**

- A. Plans should be based on the assumption that your establishment will remain open throughout the pandemic, although you may need to scale down certain operations. You should:

- Analyse the potential impact of staff or student absenteeism on day-to-day operations;
- Determine priorities and consider whether there are services that could be scaled down and/or suspended should it prove necessary;
- Agree how priority activities will be maintained through the pandemic;
- Ensure all role holders within the plan have appointed deputies who understand their role and responsibilities in the event of them being required;
- Make sure there are up to date contact lists of names, phone numbers and addresses for all staff and students;
- Consider your policies for staff absences eg to include staff taking time off to care for a sick member of their family;
- Consider how you would manage any media interest, including preparing a number of standard responses and identifying spokespersons;

- Ensure you know who to contact at your local Health Protection Teams;
- Review your supply chain and ensure critical suppliers on whom the institution is reliant, eg fuel, cleaning contractors, caterers, have adequate plans in place to maintain provision of service;
- Check the coverage of your insurance policies;
- Consider plans for providing continuity of education.

**Q. Who makes the decision about whether we should close or scale down our operations?**

- A. Higher and Further Education Institutions should continue to make their own decisions regarding scaling down operations, with expert advice from their local Health Protection Team.

Such decisions are matters for vice-chancellors, principals, governors and other senior managers. You should ensure that all concerned are clear about the decision-making responsibilities and the process for keeping the institution open, reducing operations, or for implementing its closure

Institutions should plan for a range of scenarios – staying open, reducing operations, and/or closing to students during a pandemic.

**Q. How will we know when to take further action?**

- A. Ensure a process is in place to monitor the impact of the pandemic across your institution. Consider any organisational ‘trigger points’ for further action. These will include a possible shortage of senior management, lecturing, cleaning, maintenance and security staff.

As with wider Business Continuity Planning, you should also think about severe disruption to the public transport network and power cuts or other utility failures, although there is currently no suggestion that these are expected.

**Q. What about students with special needs?**

- A. Ensure that your plans take account of the needs of students with learning difficulties. Ensure they can identify symptoms and that they are clear on the precautions that can be taken. For further information contact [www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk). For those students with complex needs, including medical needs, who are in residential colleges, you will need to consider whether it is in the best interest of the student for them to remain in situ, even if the rest of the establishment has been closed to the majority of staff and students.

**Q. What about international students?**

- A. You should also ensure that your plans take account of the needs of international students – both those currently at your institution and those based overseas who may have concerns about travel to the UK – providing clear information, contact points and ‘flu friends’ as appropriate.

Guidance on international travel advice can be found on the [Foreign & Commonwealth Office](#) and [World Health Organisation](#) websites.

**Q. How should we engage with the staff and students’ unions?**

- A. You should involve your students’ union at all stages of the planning process, especially given its potentially substantial role in induction activities, social programmes etc. It may also be helpful to make arrangements for the students’ union to report on potential swine flu cases because its officers and staff may become aware of them first.

Students should be encouraged to consider setting up ‘flu friend schemes’, so that those who have not been affected by the virus can support those that have. This may be of particular value for recently arrived international students, and those living alone with no local or family support.

It is important to engage with staff unions as a means of disseminating information quickly. You may also wish to consider updating your websites with a Frequently Asked Questions section for staff and students, addressing such issues as:

- What should I do if I feel unwell at work / university / college?
- Will the university / college change how it provides services?
- What about contingency planning for staff being absent?

**Q. How should we prepare for the start of the new academic year in September?**

- A. Further and Higher Education Institutions are advised to include guidance on swine flu in new students' welcome packs. This should include standard hygiene advice and the number of the National Flu Information Line (0800 1 513 513) and [www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk). It would be useful to include an A5 copy of the NHS ‘Catch It, Bin It, Kill It’ poster. It may also be useful to supply this poster to returning students. To find out more about ‘Catch it, Bin it, Kill it’ and download / order posters, visit

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

Remind new residential students that it is always good practice to register with a GP as soon as they arrive. Assessment and antivirals for swine flu, if required, are accessed through local GP practices. However, students don't need to be registered with a GP to get this particular service.

**Q. There has been some discussion in the press about schools being advised to close during a pandemic. Would Higher and Further Education Institutions be advised to close?**

A. Due to various factors, such as hygiene, children have previously played an important role in spreading virus, during seasonal influenza as well as during a previous pandemic. In contrast, the students, staff and users of Higher and Further Education Institutions are mostly adults, who are more likely to take precautions and adjust their behaviour during a pandemic.

There is no reason to think that closing Higher and Further Education Institutions would provide any benefit. This is under constant review, however, and there may be changes if circumstances and scientific evidence change.

Further Education colleges may need to consider different arrangements for their 14-16 learners, if their schools have closed.

**Q. What further guidance is available?**

A. Should you require further guidance please refer to the Welsh Assembly website at [www.wales.gov.uk/swineflu](http://www.wales.gov.uk/swineflu).

**Q. Who should I contact if I have other questions?**

A. Officials at the Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills will be able to help you.

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