



Local Government Association



improvement and development agency

Prepared for a pandemic?

Swine Flu (H1N1) information for elected members



part of the LGA group

Local authorities play an important supporting role in planning for, and responding to, a pandemic flu outbreak. As a councillor, you need to understand this role and contribute to its fulfilment as part of your wider community leadership role.

Councils have responsibility for a wide range of functions from social care to cemeteries and crucially you will exercise a local leadership role in emergencies. Sustaining the provision or commissioning of a range of services on which many vulnerable people rely, including residential and nursing homes, while facing significant staff shortages in a pandemic is vital for service users – and it is also crucial to the council's reputation.

What should members do to ensure that their council is prepared?

- ensure that a comprehensive risk management strategy, including a business continuity plan for essential and contracted out services, is in operation within your council. Ensure that a pandemic response team has been set up within the council to deal with the outbreak
- encourage Overview and Scrutiny to play a role, for example by reviewing the risk management strategy and business continuity plan to ensure that it is up to date and effective
- make sure that the plans address levels of possible staff sickness absence. Numbers in this category will depend on the clinical attack rate. If a pandemic occurs over one wave, this level of cumulative absence could be experienced by employers over a period of around 3-4 months. Ensure plans are in line with the latest planning assumptions issued by Government
- as most flu sufferers will need to be cared for in a community setting, developing integrated health and social care plans is a particularly important part of local planning. Ensure arrangements are in place for front-line social care staff to have access to face masks from the local NHS supply
- a comprehensive communications strategy, which enables communication with the workforce (on-site and off-site), elected members, the media as well as with the local community must be in place and be effective. Ensure that media statements and public information are consistent with national advice to ensure consistency, maintain public confidence and avoid confusion
- ensure particular care and support is offered to the elderly, vulnerable and most at risk in your communities. Emergency and social services will be stretched during the pandemic, so encourage local communities and voluntary sector organisations to look out for each other and check on elderly and vulnerable citizens as 'flu friends'
- should the outbreak look likely to lead to fatalities that exceed usual planning levels then ensure that a plan to manage deaths is in place. This should involve Coroners, Registration Services, cemeteries and crematoria. Local faith communities, other cemetery and crematoria providers and funeral directors should be consulted

- make sure that you are aware of the current World Health Organisation alert phases and corresponding UK alert levels including the appropriate responses needed. See pages 67 – 72 of the national framework for responding to an influenza epidemic
- ask the pandemic response team to supply regular briefings that acknowledge the role of members, both in feeding local intelligence back into the council and in providing reassurance out in communities.

How could swine flu affect your communities?

A pandemic will have considerable impacts on all local communities across the UK. Its course will be determined not only by what the Government does or the effectiveness of the health response, but also by the actions of a wide range of others as organisations, individuals and communities. Building and maintaining public confidence is a critical success factor. Through you, their leaders, well-prepared and informed communities will play a key role in supporting the planning for, response to and recovery from a flu pandemic. Community networks and faith communities can be particularly effective in such areas as disseminating information, supplying advice and reassurance, identifying those who may be at particular risk and providing support to the vulnerable. You should therefore actively involve such organisations in developing and testing response plans.

Further resources

The Local Government Association (LGA) is active in the national level response and attends the Cabinet level Civil Contingencies Committee. The LGA provides regular updates for councils on its website accordingly. You can also email civil.contingencies@lga.gov.uk for more information.

LGE Swine Flu Guidance for HR Managers

Pandemic Flu – Health Protection Agency

Cabinet Office Guidance

Epidemic and Pandemic Alert and response – World Health Organisation

Daily updates from the Department of Health

Preparing for pandemic flu – guidance for all local resilience forum planners

Further advice on exclusion from schools and the workplace is available from the Health Protection Agency website.

What is Swine flu and how to recognise it?

Swine flu (also known as the H1N1 virus) 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 and scientists are investigating its origins. Our understanding of the virus is still developing so this information is liable to change.

Swine flu has been confirmed in many countries and it is spreading from human to human. The World Health Organisation has declared a pandemic to reflect the spread of the disease.

Pandemic flu is different from ordinary flu because it is a new flu virus that appears in humans and spreads very quickly from person to person worldwide. The Health Protection Agency (HPA) is closely monitoring cases of swine flu in the UK. Go to **Media updates on Swine Flu** to get the latest information.

Because it is a new virus, no one is immune and everyone is at risk of catching it. This includes healthy adults as well as older people, young children and those with existing medical conditions.

Consider environmental prevention measures

The council should consider using prominent display signs to discourage staff and visitors with flu symptoms from entering the council and remind them of:

- what are the symptoms and signs of flu?
- the importance of self-isolation of individuals with symptoms consistent with flu
- the importance of respiratory etiquette (Catch it, Bin it, Kill it campaign – NHS advice) and hand-hygiene at all times
- encourage cleaning staff to clean surfaces frequently with the usual cleaning materials
- the council should consider giving improved access to effective hand hygiene facilities and where practical, handrubs with an alcohol-based cleaner could be made available at all public and staff entrances
- attending meetings at external venues (e.g. visiting other councils).

As the disease spreads, councillors and employees should check in advance whether any external workplace they are due to attend is affected and seek guidance from the organisation concerned before attending. Any employee, who has concerns about visiting external venues during widespread pandemic illness, should seek advice from their line manager.

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