



# **PANDEMIC FLU**

Guidance for infection control for schools and  
early years or group childcare settings

## PLANNING FOR A HUMAN INFLUENZA PANDEMIC

### INFECTION CONTROL HOW TO REDUCE THE SPREAD OF PANDEMIC FLU

#### Guidance for schools and early years or group childcare settings

## Introduction

### Who is this guidance for?

1. The guidance is designed to assist staff in local authorities and non-residential schools (in both the state and independent sectors) and early years or group childcare settings. It is not aimed at childminders, for whom there is separate guidance, available at: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/07/05121404/1>
2. It supplements general guidance on planning for a flu pandemic previously issued in Scotland, and available from: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/PandemicFlu>
3. This 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 any preparations that need to be made well in advance of a pandemic. While much of the guidance would not need to be implemented until there is a pandemic, some previous preparation – supplies of materials, raising awareness – will help you to be ready to respond to a pandemic.
5. You will be advised by the Scottish Government via your local authority and the media if the World Health Organisation changes the pre-pandemic “phase”, the alert level that they use to guide worldwide planning. You should then review your plans.

## Guidance

### What is Pandemic Influenza (Flu)?

6. Flu is a familiar infection in Scotland, especially in the winter months. The illness caused by flu can be mild or severe, and 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.
7. Pandemic flu is different from ordinary flu as it occurs when a new flu

virus emerges into the human population and spreads readily and rapidly from person to person worldwide. There were three pandemics during the past century occurring in 1918-19, in 1957 and in 1968.

8. As it will be a new virus, the entire population will be susceptible because nobody will have any 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.

9. 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?

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

11. Children aged six months and 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. 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 can continue to spread virus 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 don't 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,) 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 (e.g. door handles, light switches etc) 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 hand hygiene practice – wash your hands regularly, particularly after coughing, sneezing or blowing your nose.
- If you have flu symptoms (see paragraph 10), 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.

#### Advance planning – local authorities, head-teachers and group childcare/early years setting managers

16 Most of the guidance focuses on what you and your staff should do in a pandemic, but you should start planning now:

- Refresh your lists of contact details for staff and parents/carers
- Review plans for dealing with possibly very high levels of staff absence
- Ensure adequate supplies of cleaning materials are readily available

or, if you contract others to provide cleaning services, check that they have contingency plans, and their 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 soaps.
- Consider how you might use hand cleansers<sup>1</sup>, for example. at the entrances to rooms or sites without hand-washing facilities.
- Check that you have procedures for isolating (with appropriate supervision) a child who falls ill during the day until their parent, guardian or known contact can collect them. The child should be isolated from the other children but also supervised in a separate room. Very young children should be monitored at least every 10 minutes as their condition can deteriorate rapidly.
- Ensure that staff are aware of relevant procedures and the infection control guidance below.

### What to do in a pandemic

17 It is possible that the Scottish Government will, through local authorities, advise schools and early years and group childcare settings to close to children during a pandemic. While your school or setting remains open, you should, however, follow the advice below.

18 You will almost certainly have had some forewarning of a pandemic before it reaches Scotland or the rest of the UK and your area. At that time, you (local authorities, headteachers and setting managers) should review your advance planning.

19 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 it promptly and carefully (bag it and bin it)
- Encouraging pupils, or children in early years and childcare setting to follow the points above, as far as it is age appropriate. Young children should be assisted to maintain good hygiene as far as possible.

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'hand cleansers' is used in this guidance for a range of cleansers and sanitisers available as alcohol gels / hand rubs, (which are most preferable) wipes and sprays. You should follow the manufacturers' guidance on the use of such materials

20. Staff should remain at home if displaying any relevant symptoms, or inform their manager and go home if they first display symptoms while at work.

21. Headteachers or setting managers should ensure that hard surfaces (door handles, light switches, taps, kitchen worktops etc) are cleaned more regularly, using normal cleaning products.

22. To reduce the spread of infection follow the advice below:

- (Headteachers/setting managers) ensure that hand hygiene facilities, and facilities for the disposal of tissues, are adequate, accessible, and in working order.
- Consider providing hand cleansers for use in the classroom to promote hand hygiene without requiring children to go to a separate wash-room.
- Where possible, provide an isolation room for use by any child who falls ill during the day until their parents, guardian or known contact can collect them, and ensure this room is cleaned very regularly.;
- Isolate the child (with appropriate supervision) and inform the parents, guardian or known contact as soon as possible. At present, with parents' or guardian agreement, it is possible for an older child to go home unsupervised, but it should be bourn in mind that a child who would normally be considered mature enough to go home unsupervised may not be able to do so when he or she is unwell.
- Remind parents and carers that children displaying flu symptoms should stay at home.
- Advise any other service which a child attends if the child displays symptoms – sports club, breakfast club's or after school club's etc.
- Get children to clean their hands after carpet work; or get them to sit on chairs instead, as carpets can cause cross-contamination.
- Discourage the sharing of pencils, crayons and pens during a pandemic.
- Encourage the wiping and cleaning of hands and items when passing around 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);
- Pay particular attention to regular cleaning of frequently touched

surfaces such as light switches and door handles, and 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.

#### Looking after a child who falls ill while in school / childcare setting

23. You should nominate a member of staff to look after the child in the isolation room, with the door to the room left open.

24. The member of staff should not sit or stay within one metre 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, which should be carried out frequently, and always before and after contact with a symptomatic child (and use of PPE).

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

26. In order to minimise the 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).

27. 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 soap and water, or hand cleansers. 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: [NHS Scotland Infection Control Policies](#).

28. When the child has gone home, make sure that the isolation room is thoroughly cleaned before its next use – with warm water and detergent, a normal household cleaning product or disinfectant.

#### Getting the right messages to children

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

30. 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.

31. We recommend that staff make use of posters on general infection control which are available from [Health Protection Scotland](#). These can help pupils avoid normal everyday infections as well as in 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.



## 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 fifteen. 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 surfaces that are frequently touched 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>

## PRACTICAL STEPS FOR SCHOOLS, EARLY YEARS AND CHILDCARE SETTINGS TO PREVENT THE SPREAD OF PANDEMIC FLU

MAIN POINTS	WHAT TO DO?
<p><b>Remember to wash your hands and remind children to wash their hands with liquid soap and water, or use hand cleansers, and make sure supplies are available</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You and children in your care must use liquid soap and water to wash soiled hands. You may use a hand cleanser to wash your hands <u>if they are not visibly soiled</u>.</li> <li>• Wash your hands as often as possible between contacts with infants and children such as before meals or feedings, after wiping the child's nose or mouth, and after touching objects such as tissues or surfaces soiled with saliva or nasal secretions.</li> <li>• Wash the hands of infants and toddlers with liquid soap and water as soon as possible when their hands become soiled.</li> <li>• Strongly encourage children to wash their hands with liquid soap and water when they become soiled – <u>teach them to wash their hands for 15 seconds</u> - in line with the Model Policy on Hand Hygiene and the Hand Hygiene Campaign. Children with medical conditions may need assistance, as they may be at greater risk if careful hygiene procedures are not followed.</li> <li>• Ensure that hand-washing areas are stocked with liquid soap and paper towels.</li> <li>• Follow the manufacturer's guidance on the use of any hand cleansers.</li> </ul>

## PRACTICAL STEPS FOR SCHOOLS, EARLY YEARS AND CHILDCARE SETTINGS TO PREVENT THE SPREAD OF PANDEMIC FLU

<p><b>Keep your environment clean and make sure that supplies are available</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep detergents, disinfectants and cleaning products out of the reach and sight of children.</li> <li>• Clean frequently touched surfaces such as light switches, door handles, hand rails, toilet handles and seats, toys and commonly shared items at least daily and when visibly soiled.</li> <li>• Use warm water and detergent or commonly available household disinfectants/cleaning products, and follow manufacturers instructions.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Remind children (depending on their age) to cover their nose and mouth when sneezing or coughing and to wash their hands with liquid soap and water immediately afterwards – and make sure you do the same</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remind children to cover their nose and mouth with a tissue when sneezing and coughing and to dispose of the tissue in a bag in a closed bin, which should be regularly emptied – <b>Bag it and Bin it.</b></li> <li>• Ensure tissues are available in rooms used for looking after children, including where meals are provided.</li> <li>• Encourage children to wash their hands with liquid soap and water as soon as possible, if they have sneezed or coughed into their hands – wash the hands of those too young to do it for themselves.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Observe all children for symptoms of fever and respiratory illness, especially when there is increased influenza in the community</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Observe closely all children with respiratory illness or any of the symptoms given in paragraph seven of the Infection Control guidance for schools, early years and childcare settings.</li> <li>• If a child should fall ill whilst in your care, arrange (wherever possible) for the child to use a separate sick room to rest, away from other children to help prevent spread of the infection.</li> </ul>

## PRACTICAL STEPS FOR SCHOOLS, EARLY YEARS AND CHILDCARE SETTINGS TO PREVENT THE SPREAD OF PANDEMIC FLU

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very young children will require careful monitoring (at least every 10 minutes) as their condition could change rapidly.</li> <li>• <u>If a child's condition begins to deteriorate rapidly, seek urgent medical help</u></li> <li>• Notify parent(s), guardian or emergency contact immediately if a child requires to be taken home and advise parents, guardian or emergency contact to seek advice from the child's doctor or the emergency flu line.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Strongly encourage parents of sick children to keep their children home. If a child you normally look after is ill, <u>do not accept them until they have fully recovered.</u></b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents of sick children must keep them at home and away from the setting until they no longer have symptoms, to prevent spreading the infection to others.</li> </ul>
<p><b>If you or your own children are ill, suspend working with children until everyone has fully recovered.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If you are unwell with symptoms of flu in a pandemic, you should not look after any children until you have recovered</li> <li>• If your own children are ill, you should not look after or work with other children until they have fully recovered.</li> <li>• Before starting to care for children again, clean your home using warm water and detergent (or a commonly available disinfectant/cleaning product), paying particular attention to hard surfaces.</li> </ul>