

THE WITHAM SCHOOLS FEDERATION

Flu Pandemic Contingency Plan

This document provides guidance in proactive and reactive actions and considerations in order to prepare for and deal with high staff absenteeism as a result of a flu pandemic. This plan should be used in conjunction with the critical incident plan of each school.

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2. Background Information

1. *Background flu pandemic information.*

Influenza pandemics have swept the world causing widespread illness, large numbers of deaths and significant social and economic disruption. They can occur at any time of the year. No country is exempt from the risk and an initial outbreak elsewhere is likely to affect the UK in less than three months due to movement of people.

Conditions in which a new virus might emerge and spread continue to exist. The recent emergence of highly pathogenic animal viruses - such as avian influenza (bird flu) outbreaks and associated infections in some people in several countries in Asia - emphasises the threat of animal viruses evolving into strains with pandemic potential. Although timing is unpredictable, the World Health Organisation (WHO) and most national and international experts believe the risk of an influenza pandemic has recently increased.

Pandemic likely to occur in two waves, about 3-9 months apart. Each wave likely to last 12 weeks. A quarter of the population could be affected. High number of cases and consultations (greater than 500 GP consultations per 100,000 population per week at peak) overwhelming health and other services. Clinical attack rate 25% with mortality assumption of 0.37 - 2.5% of those affected. Age range vulnerability - all ages, including children, likely to be affected.

-Lincolnshire Community Risk Register 2007

Influenza spread will be accelerated in schools and other closed communities leading to a potential need to close schools. This will exacerbate absenteeism, as workers need to provide care for family members and others.

Movement restrictions, constraints on public gatherings, distribution difficulties, increased deaths, anxiety and bereavement are all likely to add pressure and disruption.

A pandemic - or potential pandemic - would also result in a high level of public, political and media concern.

2. *Roles and Responsibilities*

Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT)

The CIMT consists of Adrian Reed Executive Headteacher, Jessica Gale, Helen Joyce and Rachael Creasey Heads of School, Niall Taylor Deputy Headteacher (HHTC) Systems Management, Polly Champion, Emma Nurse and Lynne Wheatley Administration Managers, Linda Beauchamp Health & Safety Officer (HHTC), Steve Chester Premises Manager (HHTC), and Chairs of Governors.

Responsibilities of the CIMT during a severe staff shortage.

- Maintain log of all decisions relating to the incident and the subsequent recovery;
- Evaluating the extent of the situation and the potential consequences for each school;
- Prioritising support to all age groups;
- Deployment of existing resources;
- Hiring/acquiring additional support staff;
- Implementing measures to protect property, resources, reputation and ensuring all sites remain secure and safe;
- Authorising continuity measures in order to provide an operational service to employees and clients;
- Corporate communication with media, employees, elected members and the public;
- Keeping records of decision making and expenditure arising out of recovery operations;
- Organising the return to normality once the emergency period has passed;
- Contacting parents and stakeholders connected with each school (advise of any disruption as appropriate).

Responsibilities of individual teachers/team leaders

- Maintain log of all decisions relating to the incident in their own area and the continuity of their functions;
- Keep accurate record of student/pupil attendance figures;
- Follow instructions and guidance from CIMT;

3. School Actions

A flu pandemic will cause disruption to a variety of areas including pupil/student attendance levels, staffing levels, supply chains and service delivery. The actions taken by the federation to deal with these disruptions must be done in a timely and effective way. The actions are split into stages of 'before pandemic' (proactive measures), 'during pandemic' (reactive measures) and 'after pandemic' (recovery measures).

The reactive measures are broken down into various levels of alert. When certain criteria are met (either within the federation or externally) this will trigger an appropriate level of alert and in turn the response actions required.

The various triggers and respective response actions are detailed in section 3.2.

UK flu pandemic alert levels

It is important to note that the alert levels detailed in this plan are specific to the federation. Within the national flu contingency-planning arrangements there are also UK alerts levels and triggers. The system is based on a 4 point alert mechanism and has been developed consistent with other UK infectious disease response plans:

UK Alert level 1 - Cases only outside the UK (in a country with no extensive UK trade or travel links).

UK Alert level 2 - New virus isolated in the UK

UK Alert level 3 - Outbreak(s) in the UK

UK Alert level 4 - Widespread activities across the UK

It is important not to confuse the different alert levels and triggers when reacting to a flu pandemic.

3.1 Pro active measures

Devise an effective cleaning programme for all equipment, which has a large amount of human contact, e.g. telephones, computer keyboards, door handles, desks. **(Site Managers)**

Skills audit to determine specialist skills within the schools staff including

- Specialist vehicle licences
- Language skills
- IT competencies.
- Administrative skills.

(Admin Managers).

Review current home learning capabilities and room for short notice expansion. **(Deputy Head SM)**

Review salaries budget to cost in excessive absence/support staff payments. **(Executive Head).**

Pre determine an interim policy for the following

- Sick certification
- Overtime payments.

(Admin Managers/Head of Schools)

Pre determine guidance to be given to staff, children and parents at each alert level.

(Head of Schools)

Identify sources of hand washing, hygiene guidance e.g. Health protection agency, world health organisation.

(Health & Safety Officer)

3.2 Reactive measures

Schools Alert level 1

Trigger points - Declared by the Executive Headteacher under guidance from administrative personnel. When sickness levels for flu related reasons noticeably rise above normal seasonal sickness patterns

OR

A flu pandemic is declared anywhere in the world.

Actions

- Sickness reporting frequency increased to daily reports if not already at this level.
- Initial flu meeting of the CIMT.
- All staff alerted to the increased levels of flu risk.
- Specific instructions to all team leaders.
- Promotion of Health Protection Agency hand washing advice e.g. posters in all toilets and communal areas.
- Inform the County Council of potential staffing level problems.
- Maximise stocks of soaps and cleansing equipment.
- Review and test any existing student/pupil home working capabilities. Including home email and Internet access. This will include ensuring that up to date information is held for students/pupils regarding electronic means of contact i.e. e-mail addresses.
- Review and update contact details for parents.
- Consider additional methods of providing home learning.
- Review, maintain and update all teachers' notes (where the class is currently at with their learning) (**see section 5**)
- Review and update all staff home contact details and ensure all staff are aware of the location of the sickness procedures.
- Ensure that sickness reporting systems are robust.
- Initiate cleaning regime of all high contact equipment.
- Inform local trade union representatives.
- Inform governors.
- Inform key stakeholders/contractors of any changes to normal service delivery.
- Identify which core subjects must be continued and which can/have to be put on hold.
- Contact supply teacher agencies to assess availability of temporary support staff.
- Contact school transport provider to identify if any driver sickness is likely to have an impact on students.
- Prioritise GCSE students/year 6 pupils in order to maximise the use of remaining teachers?
- Merge classes (refer to school closure protocol)

Schools Alert level 2

Trigger points - Declared by the Executive Headteacher under guidance from administrative support when sickness levels amongst college teaching staff reach or peak levels of minimum teacher / student ratio.

OR

Government encourages a blanket closure of schools nationally or locally.

Actions

- Everything within alert level 1 plus;
- Second meeting of the CIMT.
- Issue letter to parents forewarning of the potential for the college to close for a period of weeks include advice to parents regarding actions which can be taken at home to reduce the spread of virus.
- Communication with all staff about the increased level of risk, health advice and contingency arrangements within college.
- Cancellation of all unnecessary meetings or large staff/student/pupil gatherings.
- Inform all suppliers, contractors and council related agencies of any contingency arrangements, which may affect them.
- Revise staff and student/pupil sick certification arrangements.
- Redeploy staff from non-critical teaching areas to areas of high criticality and high absentee levels, (liaise with teachers and staff unions about this process).
- Stop any teacher/parent contact activities.
- Review sickness policy for absence consequences.
- Review salaries budget to cost in absence cover payments.
- Inform public of any disruptions to normal service delivery.

Schools Alert level 3

Trigger points - First flu pandemic related fatality within the UK.

Actions

- Third meeting of the CIMT
- Everything within level 2 plus;
- Keep staff well informed to alleviate fear & fear related absenteeism.

Schools Alert level 4

Trigger points - federation student/pupil or staff member flu related fatality

Actions

- Fourth CIMT meeting
- Follow guidance details in critical incident guidance / plan.
- Appropriately inform all staff and students/pupils of the death.
- Keep staff well informed to alleviate fear & fear related absenteeism.

3.3 Recovery Measures

Schools Alert level 5 - (Return to normality)

Triggers - Sickness levels amongst teaching staff return to a safe teacher / student/pupil ratio level.

And/or

Any government decision to close schools is reversed.

Actions

- Meeting of the CIMT
- Managed redeployment of staff to normal teaching areas.
- Continue increased levels of hygiene (hand washing guidance etc)
- Sickness reporting frequency decreased to normal levels.
- Review any interim overtime arrangements, which have been established to help cope with the pandemic.
- Inform parents of reinstated school services.
- Review the well being of those who have not taken sick leave throughout the pandemic. Consider an appropriate support scheme with emphasis on reducing any exhaustion or excess stress.
- Reinstatement meetings and school gatherings
- Reinstatement parent/staff face-to-face contact functions.
- Reinstatement normal sickness absence arrangements (if changed).
- Review salaries budget.
- Keep staff informed of all changes.
- Review success of all home learning carried out throughout the pandemic.
- Hold a response debrief with opportunity for all staff to express their opinions.
- Action all lessons learned and necessary changes following debrief.
- Memorial service for any staff members or students/pupils who have died as a result of the flu.
- Consider solutions to allow students/pupils to catch up with the curriculum if they have fallen behind.

4. Students/pupils falling ill during the day

If a student/pupil falls ill during the day, parents/carers will be informed to collect their child immediately. If for any reason they cannot be contacted or the child cannot be collected immediately, then the child will be kept in isolation in a suitable area.

5. *Continuation of teaching*

- Exam classes/year 6 will take priority if any of the schools have to partially close.
- Students/pupils will be reminded about Internet based software such as Samlearning, Mymaths and any other software to support learning at home.
- Students/pupils will be reminded about work that can be accessed through the Internet.
- Students/pupils will be informed about communications that will be available between home and school.
- Work may also be posted home including pre-paid envelope for work to be returned.

Schools will remain open as a base for teachers; it will only be closed for students.

6. *Decision to close the college.*

The Executive Headteacher will take this decision after advice from the LA.

7. *Other useful information*

School closures

The Government may advise schools and early years/childcare settings to close in order to reduce the spread of infection amongst children. This advice will be provided only if closure is anticipated to produce significant health benefits. Closures will be area specific (whilst the virus is circulating in the locality) and are likely to be for two to three weeks, although they may be extended if the pandemic remains in the area. A further 5-6% of staff could be absent as a result of school closures, though this is based on an analysis of informal childcare being available for parents.

Period of absence from flu

Up to 50% of the workforce may require time off at some stage over the entire period of the pandemic, with individuals likely to be absent for a period of seven to ten working days. Absenteeism should follow the pandemic profile, with an expectation that it will build to a peak lasting for two to three weeks, when between 15% and 20% of staff from the **workforce** may be absent, and then decline.

Additional staff absences are likely to result from other illnesses, taking time off to provide care for dependants (eg children), family bereavement, other psychosocial impacts, fear of infection or practical difficulties in getting to work.

8. Staff/students/pupils communications plan (reactive)

Methods of communication

- Hand wash and virus spread posters in all offices, communal areas and toilets.
- All school/home email
- Letter to parents
- Intranet
- Staff training sessions
- Virus control lessons to students/pupils
- Staff should bring their own mug into school to use and keep for themselves.
- Information needs to be given to all staff/students/pupils on the following areas.
- Infection control;
 - hand washing
 - lack of contact (hand shakes etc)
 - transmission routes (eyes, mouth, nose)
 - Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) where appropriate

Actions to take if infected;

If you feel unwell, have high fever, cough and/or sore throat:

- Stay at home and keep away from school (don't be a hero and come into school).
- Inform school about absence in the usual way
- Rest and take plenty of fluids.
- Cover your mouth and nose with disposable tissues when coughing and sneezing and dispose of the used tissues properly.
- Wash your hands with soap and water frequently and thoroughly, especially after coughing or sneezing.

If you need medical attention:

- Contact your doctor or healthcare provider before travelling to see them and report your symptoms. Explain why you think you have swine influenza (for example, if you have recently travelled to a country where there is a swine influenza outbreak in humans). Follow the advice given to you for care.
- If it is not possible to contact your healthcare provider in advance, communicate your suspicion of having swine influenza immediately upon arrival at the healthcare facility.
- Take care to cover your nose and mouth during travel.

If a member of staff has someone in their family who has the illness, they should contact the Admin Manager for advice. If they cannot attend work because they have to look after a sick child, contact the Admin Manager to inform.

Communication with the local authority

Absence figures should be reported to the County Council. We will provide the details of the contact and the form in which we need this information should it prove necessary.

9. *Schools Critical providers*

In the event of problems with the schools' service providers, such as cleaning contractors or catering provision, School Closure Protocol will be followed.

Annex - General infection control actions

- covering the nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing
- disposing of dirty tissues promptly and carefully - bagging and binning them
- washing hands frequently with soap and warm water, or using an alcohol hand rub, to reduce the spread of the virus from the hands to the face or to other people, particularly after blowing the nose or disposing of tissues
- minimising contact between hands and mouth/nose unless hands have just been washed
- making sure children follow this advice
- regularly cleaning frequently touched hard surfaces (eg kitchen worktops, door handles) using normal cleaning products
- avoiding crowded gatherings where possible, especially in enclosed spaces.