

SWINE FLU INFORMATION TO LOCAL AGE CONCERNS

This briefing provides local Age Concerns with general information and guidance to help you develop your own response to the current, and developing outbreak of Swine Flu. Your local situation and circumstances will vary, and you can obtain more detailed and regularly updated guidance from www.dh.gov.uk or NHS Direct on 0845 4647. You should also make yourself aware of any imminent changes in procedures with the introduction of the Swine Flu National Service – to be launched shortly but details of which are not yet available

All households will have received the Swine Flu Information leaflet from the Department of Health which gives guidance on the virus, how to protect yourself against the virus and what to do if you get swine flu. The leaflet is available on the web, in easy-read formats like PDF and also as MP3 downloads, in different languages. These can all be accessed at www.dh.gov.uk or telephone the Swine Flu information line on 0800 1 513 513.

It is important that, no matter how small your Age Concern, you work with your colleagues to prepare a simple Action Plan, or more complex Business Continuity Plan, depending on your size and circumstances. This will help you manage the situation as it develops. You may find it helpful to contact your neighbouring Age Concerns to see if you can work together with them to develop plans and share resources.

A checklist of measures to consider when preparing your Action Plan is at Annex A to this instruction. This list is not exhaustive and smaller Age Concerns should 'pick 'n mix' with regard to the measures relevant to them.

Listed below is some general guidance on health matters with regard to Swine Flu.

1 General Information – for you and your staff, volunteers, and service users. Please share this information with them where appropriate

Swine Flu is now spreading in communities across many parts of the country and it is inevitable that many of us will catch this virus. Luckily the effect on sufferers to date has been mild, with few developing serious complications, unless they have previous serious health issues. Unlike previous seasonal flu outbreaks, Swine Flu currently seems to have a more serious impact on younger people.

However we should not be complacent as this could change in the late autumn, when seasonal flu generally appears. Those who are pregnant or who have respiratory health issues need to take extra care as, with the case of many flu viruses, this can pose more of a health risk to this group. A healthy regime of adequate sleep, nutritious food and regular exercise will aid your immune system and help to combat both this and any subsequent infection.

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In the meantime it is important that we maintain good hygiene standards both personally, and in our work areas, and not to over-react to every sniffle, cough and sneeze we may get during the coming months.

2 Symptoms

a) Swine flu is a respiratory disease with elements of a virus commonly found in pigs, hence the name. Symptoms are similar to those of seasonal flu, and in the vast majority of cases are accompanied by a sudden onset of fever (a temperature above 38 degrees). Check your temperature with a thermometer to be sure. Other symptoms can include:

- Sore throat;
- Coughs and sneezing;
- Short of breath;
- runny nose;
- loss of appetite;
- headache, chills and
- muscle aches, joint pains.

Some may suffer from bouts of vomiting and diarrhoea.

b) If you have not travelled abroad recently or been in contact with a known case, it is likely that you have seasonal flu. You should stay at home and treat yourself accordingly, contacting your GP/family doctor by telephone.

Any staff member/volunteer or service user with some or all of these symptoms should be told to stay at home and contact their GP/family doctor for advice/treatment. Inform the GP/family doctor if you are pregnant. Most surgeries are saying that people with symptoms should not attend surgeries but telephone for advice.

3 What can I do to help stop me, my staff and volunteers, and service users getting flu?

The best thing you can do to help stop yourself and other people from getting flu is to be careful not to spread the virus. Practice good healthy habits including getting adequate sleep, eating nutritious food, and keeping physically active. As flu is an infectious respiratory disease when you cough or sneeze it is very important that you:

- Always carry tissues with you;
- Use a clean tissue to cover your mouth and nose every time you cough or sneeze – **catch it**.

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- Bin the tissues after one use – **bin it**.
- Wash your hands often with soap and hot water, and/or a special gel – **kill it**
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- If you are sick with flu, stay at home to avoid spreading infection to others. Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.

REMEMBER: CATCH IT - BIN IT - KILL IT

4 Do our staff or volunteers need to wear a face mask?

The advice from the Department of Health is that you do not need to wear a face mask.

5 Other non-flu conditions that can make you feel unwell at this time

Head Cold

Head colds are just that, and normally give rise to headaches, nose and ear problems, and far less severe symptoms than true flu. With over 200 cold viruses out there causing trouble for up to two weeks, sometimes with slight fever, ear, or sinus trouble, it is sometimes easy to assume you have flu.

First step is to check your temperature. If below 38 degrees, use products from the chemist that contain drugs like paracetamol, or ibuprofen, unless you are allergic to them, to help ease the symptoms. It's a good idea to stock up on these simple remedies.

Hay fever (allergy to pollen)

This feels different; you get itchy eyes, nose and throat, sneezing, and a blocked or runny nose. Some people can also get an asthma-type cough or wheezing. Allergies don't cause the type of fever that infections do, and the symptoms will improve with allergy eye drops, nasal sprays and antihistamines from the chemist.

6 Not getting better?

If you find that your home treatments aren't working, or you develop flu-like symptoms, call your GP/Family Doctor or NHS Direct for telephone advice on 0845 4647.

Any doctor or nurse who suspects you have swine flu will arrange for treatment and possible testing at your home, where you should remain to stop the spread of the virus.

Remember, if you are pregnant, have been travelling abroad recently, or have been in contact with a known case of swine flu, tell your GP/family doctor.

Try to avoid going to your doctor or to hospital as you could infect others.

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7 What if I have an ill person at home?

- Try to provide the ill person with a separate section in the house. If this is not possible, keep them at least 1 meter in distance from others.
- Limit the number of people who have close contact to the minimum.
- Cover your mouth and nose when caring for them.
- Wash your hands with soap and water thoroughly after each contact with the ill person.
- Try to improve the air flow in the area where the ill person stays. Use doors and windows to take advantage of breezes.
- Keep the environment clean with readily available household cleaning agents.
- If you are in any doubt contact your GP/family doctor by telephone for advice. Alternatively contact NHS Direct for advice.

8 What if an employee gets sick with flu-like symptoms?

If an employee calls in sick with flu-like symptoms, give advice as described above. If they have not recently visited an affected area or been in contact with a known case of swine flu they should treat this as seasonal flu and contact their GP/family doctor by telephone. If Swine Flu is suspected they should contact their GP/family doctor. In any case they should stay away from work until the symptoms subside. Where appropriate your action plan may include giving such people the ability to work at home, as well as how you will cope with possible reductions in staffing levels.

9 What if a service user becomes ill?

Service users and/or their carers should be made aware of your guidance regarding symptoms and treatment, and should be asked to ensure that your organisation is contacted if symptoms develop. They should not attend Day Centres, Clubs or other similar services where people gather until the symptoms subside. If a Domiciliary Care service user develops symptoms or is confirmed with Swine Flu you should not automatically withdraw the service provided, but on a case by case basis assess if the service can continue with staff/volunteers using the precautions described at Para 7 above

If you provide services in a residential care setting, you should follow the guidance at Para 7 above, paying particular attention to the need to take modest protective measures where needed. We would not recommend any closure of services or facilities unless advised by local health or social care professionals.

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10 Further Advice and Information?

For more detailed guidance on health related issues please refer to the national sources of government support identified previously in this document. For operational matters please contact your Age Concern and Help the Aged Regional Office.

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ANNEX A – CHECK LIST FOR A LOCAL ACTION PLAN

Plan and prepare now

- What is the level of awareness of pandemic flu within your organisation?
- Have you told your volunteers and staff what to expect and what to do?
- Are they aware of the need for good hand-hygiene and the 'Catch it-Kill it-Bin it' campaign with regard to coughing and sneezing?
- Do they know how to treat themselves should they become ill?
- Do you have robust infection control measures in place within the workplace? e.g. hand-washing facilities, increased use of anti-bacterial gels.
- Have you got a plan of action?
- Have you nominated people who will lead on planning within your organisation?
- Have you involved your service users and volunteers in your planning?
- Have you involved partner organisations in planning and are you part of theirs?
- Have you explored potential partnerships with other third sector organisations to offer support and pool or share resources?
- Have you developed internal and external communications plans?
- Do you have key contact information for volunteers, staff, partner organisations and suppliers?
- Are you actively involved with your Local Resilience Forum?
- Have you assessed if your plan will work? (walk/talk through it in slow time)

Maintain business critical activities

- Have you prioritised the functions that are essential to ensure your continued organisational viability?
- Has your planning taken account of a range of impact scenarios?
- Have you planned contingency arrangements should your key resources be disrupted?
- Have you considered legal and financial implications?
- How will you ensure you meet your duty of care to your service users?
- Are you clear about how decisions are made and are lines of accountability in place across the organisation?

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- Do you have mechanisms in place to support volunteers and staff - guidance on safe working practices, risk assessment procedures, personal protection equipment (if deemed necessary by Local Authorities or other statutory bodies)

Suspending or scaling down existing activities

- Within a range of impact scenarios, what activities do you plan to suspend or scale down according to your local situation?
- Have you assessed the impact on your service users?
- What may be the impact on statutory/private partners or suppliers?
- What may be the impact on your income?
- Have you taken legal advice on implications for contracts and service level agreements?
- What may be the impact on staff (contracts of employment)?
- What are your plans to redeploy your volunteer and staff resource?
- Have you considered the risk to your reputation?
- How will you communicate your decisions internally and externally?
- What are your plans to scale up or restore suspended activities?

Not all of the above will be relevant for smaller Age Concerns.

Enhance or expand existing activities

- Have you, your partner organisations or service users identified a potential need for enhanced or expanded provision? e.g. Provision of 'flu friends' in your local community, to collect anti-viral drugs, shopping etc, on behalf of affected people.
- Do your current capabilities and resources enable you to respond to any newly identified need? If not, how will you respond?
- Does your planning include exit strategies to enable you to get back to business as usual once the pandemic has passed?

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Post pandemic recovery

- Is post pandemic recovery considered in your planning?
- Have you considered the long-term implications of the pandemic on your organisational systems and structure, and the long-term psychological and social support your workforce may require?
- Have you considered how long it may take to re-establish normal working practice?
- What mechanisms can you put in place to ensure lessons learnt support you to prepare, plan and respond to future emergencies?

For larger organisations a generic business continuity management toolkit, produced by Cabinet Office, is available at:

www.direct.gov.uk/en/Governmentcitizensandrights/Dealingwithemergencies/Preparingforemergencies/DG_175927