

PANDEMIC INFLUENZA

(This document is based on the information available as at 31 July 2006)

References:

- A. UK Influenza Pandemic Contingency Plan (NHS) - October 2005.
- B. Pandemic Influenza – Managing the Risks of an Invisible Threat – Aon, October 2005.
- C. DfES Guidance: Planning for a Human Influenza Pandemic – July 2006.

Introduction

1. An influenza pandemic is currently being predicted by experts at the World Health Organization (WHO). Flu pandemics occur sporadically at any time of the year and are likely to come in 2 or more waves, several months apart, with each wave lasting 3 to 4 months.
2. The Government will implement a public education campaign early on in a pandemic, on the nature of the infection and the measures the public and organisations can take to reduce its spread. Information will be widely available on Health Department websites and in leaflet form.
3. The Department of Health will coordinate the UK health response, procure appropriate drugs, lead the public health service response and provide information to other Government departments to assist them in their response arrangements.
4. In their recently published guidance for schools, The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) advises that schools should continue operating as normally as possible during a pandemic. DfES also advises that, when more is known about the nature of a pandemic strain of virus and children's vulnerability to it, the Government may advise schools in affected areas to close to pupils for a period.

Purpose

5. This purpose of this document is to inform parents of the School's approach in the event of a flu pandemic.

Vinehall School's Approach

6. With the exception of boarding, the School will remain open for as long as the availability of staff and pupils, together with essential services and supplies, make it viable to do so.
7. However, the School is neither equipped nor staffed to be able to care for, or quarantine, boarders under the levels of infection envisaged in a flu pandemic. As a result, and in order to reduce the spread of infection, boarding facilities will be closed as soon as the pandemic threatens the School and parents will be asked to take their children home as soon as possible. In the case of boarders whose families live abroad, parents should ensure that they have arrangements in place for them to be looked after by UK-based guardians.
8. An internal assessment of the likely impact of pandemic flu indicates that the School could continue to function with up to 50% of pupils and staff off sick at a given time, although certain activities and facilities are likely to have to be suspended. Thereafter it is likely to be necessary to close until sufficient pupils and staff have recovered. This decision will be made by the Chairman of Governors, with advice from the Head and School Doctor.
9. Parents and staff will be kept informed of events through regular updates. As disruptions to Royal Mail's services are considered likely, the preferred means of communication will be by

email, or via the School's website, although letters will be sent to those without this facility. It is therefore important that parents and staff ensure that the School has their correct email address and contact details at all times.

10. Parents are asked to assist in reducing the spread of infection by ensuring that if either they or their children become ill, or think they may be ill, they stay at home until fully recovered. The same applies to staff. Furthermore, if anyone in a family becomes infected, all members of the family should remain away from school until fully recovered.

Inter Pandemic Stage

11. During the inter pandemic stage (i.e. now), the School will:
 - a. Monitor publications from the Department of Health and DfES and update continuity plans as necessary.
 - b. Inform pupils about pandemic flu and the School's approach through Assemblies, form periods and PSHE lessons, at a level of detail appropriate to their age, comprehension and proximity of the threat.
12. The first indication of an increased threat is likely to be the introduction of restrictions on international travel, by the World Health Organisation or UK Government. When this occurs, the Head will advise parents of overseas boarders from affected countries as follows:
 - a. Restrictions Introduced during Term Time. Children may, if free from infection, either return home for the holidays but may not return to school until restrictions are lifted; or spend the holidays with their UK-based guardian, in which case they may return to school the following term.
 - b. Restrictions Introduced during the Holidays. Children may not return to school from overseas until the restrictions are lifted.
13. Parents will be aware that the School offers the HSBC's Fees Refund Scheme, which provides a refund of fees in the event of absence from school due to illness of more than 4 days for boarders, or 5 days for day children. It is billed automatically with each term's fee, unless parents choose to opt out. Those who have opted out in the past may now wish to re-consider.

Pandemic Stage

14. The start of a pandemic in UK will be determined by the Government. This may occur either during term time or the holidays but, in either event, the Head will convene a meeting of key staff to:
 - a. Take stock of the situation facing the School.
 - b. Consider the latest Government and local Health Authority advice. (This may include advice on whether schools in affected areas should stay open or close, on the basis of scientific advice. However, the decision on whether to close at that time remains with the school and will be made by the Head).
 - c. Implement measures to reduce the risk of infection. These are likely to include, but not be limited to:
 - The cancellation of matches with other schools

- The cancellation of visits to/by other schools and organisations (e.g. those that use the school's facilities)
- The cancellation of school trips and visits (including boarders trips at weekends)
- The cancellation of plays and concerts
- The suspension of whole school assemblies
- The cancellation of staff training, conferences and meetings at external venues
- The implementation of basic precautions to reduce the risk of catching or spreading flu (see Annex A).

15. When pandemic flu is diagnosed in the School, the Head will hold regular meetings to:

- a. Review the number of pupils and staff affected, and forecast return dates.
- b. Determine the necessary adjustments to classes, curriculum, activities and events, meals and school hours for the following day.
- c. Prepare updates for parents, pupils staff and governors.
- d. Prepare any information requested by the local authority (e.g. absence rates).

16. During the course of a pandemic, the School will aim to:

- a. Maintain teaching and other activities by adjusting or merging classes as necessary, in line with the availability of pupils and staff.
- b. Set and correct homework for those pupils who are in quarantine or convalescing at home, via the internet, or by mail for those without that facility. (Note: the School has recently introduced a facility, Ranger Outpost, which enables staff and pupils to access files on the School's network from their home computers.)
- c. Do everything reasonably possible, through the Brookwood Partnership, to ensure that a catering service is maintained. However, should this become impossible, it may be necessary for pupils and staff to bring a packed lunch to school.
- d. Keep parents, staff and governors fully informed.
- e. Support pupils and staff in the event of bereavement, through the provision of counselling.

17. In the event of closure, the School would remain open to staff, who should come into school to set and mark work, unless ill or caring for dependants.

Amendments

18. Should the national guidance or School policy change, this document will be amended and parents informed accordingly.

Annex:

A. Basic Precautions.

Basic Precautions

Face masks will have little place in preventing the spread of the virus. But it is possible to reduce, though not eliminate, the risk of catching or spreading flu during a pandemic by:

- covering the nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing, using a tissue when possible
- disposing of dirty tissues promptly and carefully – bag and bin them
- avoiding non-essential travel and large crowds whenever possible
- maintaining good basic hygiene - washing your hands frequently with soap and water protects against picking up the virus from surfaces and passing it on, and from spreading the virus from hands to face, or to other people
- frequent cleaning of hard surfaces (eg worktops, door handles, desks, computer keyboards, telephones etc), using a normal cleaning product
- having a supply of masks (e.g. for use by any staff attending to infected people or disposing of used tissues etc)
- making sure staff and pupils follow this advice
- ensuring that if anyone becomes ill, or thinks they may be ill, they stay at home or be sent home as soon as possible. They should be asked to wear a mask until they can go or be sent home and then:
 - stay at home, rest, and take medicines such as aspirin, ibuprofen or paracetamol to relieve the symptoms (following the instructions with the medicines)
 - drink plenty of fluids.