



Richmond House
79 Whitehall
London SW1A 2NS

Gateway Reference: 6920.

To: Local Authority Chief Executives
Directors of Adult Social Services
Local Authority Emergency Planners
Strategic Health Authority Influenza Pandemic Co-ordinators
Primary Care Trust Influenza Pandemic Co-ordinators

Copy: Primary Care Trust Chief Executives
[Voluntary Sector organisations]
[Social Care organisations]

27 July 2006

Dear Colleague,

INFLUENZA PANDEMIC PLANNING OPERATIONAL GUIDANCE FOR SOCIAL CARE

Summary

I am writing to advise you of our plans to develop operational guidance for use by social care service commissioners and providers when planning for a possible influenza pandemic. We intend to publish this guidance for consultation by the end of September 2006. This letter also sets out actions councils and their partners could take in advance of the publication of the guidance.

Background

In England, we are accustomed to the annual round of influenza, which lays low a relatively small percentage of the population and is relatively mild in most cases. However, every few decades this annual occurrence reaches pandemic proportions.

You may be aware that, although the symptoms may seem to be similar, each year the influenza virus is slightly different. In fact the virus that causes influenza is constantly changing, or mutating, producing new strains. From time-to-time, a virus will develop which is sufficiently dissimilar to previous strains that the human immune system is caught out and takes longer than usual to adapt its defences in order to fight off the virus. As a result, the virus is able to infect more people than usual and spreads more quickly. For ease of reference I will refer to this type as influenza virus as "pandemic flu".

In the last century, there have been three outbreaks of pandemic flu, occurring in 1918, 1957 and 1968. Scientific evidence suggests that another pandemic is likely to occur in the near future, although it is impossible to predict exactly when that will be. However, the World Health Organization is on constant lookout for the first signs of pandemic flu emerging and will give the world as much advance notice as possible.

When the next pandemic flu strain does emerge it will almost certainly reach the UK, and once it arrives, it is likely to spread throughout the country in a matter of weeks. Inevitably, such an outbreak has potentially serious implications for the country's ability to continue to deliver both formal and informal care services with a significant proportion of the working population, including informal carers, laid low for two or more weeks.

Existing Pandemic Planning Guidance

In order to plan for such an occurrence, the Department of Health has produced a [contingency plan](#), which sets out the overall strategic framework for the UK's response to a flu pandemic. It has also published an [operational framework](#) for NHS organisations to help them prepare for, and support, an effective response to a flu pandemic. Other operational frameworks are also being produced for other service eg. prisons and schools

Operational Guidance for Social Care

The impact of a flu pandemic on social services is likely to be intense and sustained. Advance planning will be key to ensure that social care organisations, their stakeholders and service users, are in the best possible position to manage such an emergency and lessen its impact.

We are developing operational guidance, specifically targeted at social care organisations and their partners and the issues relevant to contingency planning in social care. The guidance will be based on the actions set out in the UK Influenza Pandemic Contingency Plan and will complement other operational frameworks aimed at the NHS, schools and prisons and other sectors.

We intend to issue draft, but fit for purpose, guidance for consultation by the end of September 2006 with final guidance issued by December 2006, subject to consultation responses and agreement to a shortened consultation period.

An advisory group of key stakeholders will oversee and direct the development of the guidance. Those stakeholders will include representatives from central Government, local authorities and the voluntary and private sectors. We will also explore how we can best involve frontline staff at this early stage.

Action to take now

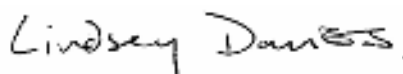
As we do not know when the next pandemic will strike, it is important that Local Authorities and other social services organisations do not wait for the publication of guidance. It is important that you begin now taking positive steps to plan for the possibility of a pandemic.

In addition to the presence of Local Authority emergency planners on local resilience committees, it is also very important that social services are well represented on contingency planning committees led by other public services, for example, Influenza Pandemic Planning Committees in each PCT

Yours sincerely



Kathryn Hudson
National Director for Social Care



Professor Lindsey Davies
National Director of Pandemic Influenza Preparedness