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Dear colleagues,

LOCAL PLANNING FOR A POSSIBLE INFLUENZA PANDEMIC

Over the last 12-18 months we have been working with Departments and with the Regional Resilience Tier to encourage planning for a possible influenza pandemic across all sectors and response levels. We do not know when such an event will occur, but this remains one of our highest risks at national and at local level. Therefore prudent planning should be a high priority and should at least include a review of generic plans to check that they will hold up well in an influenza pandemic. The H5N1 avian influenza virus currently circulating in an increasing number of countries is still a concern. Although this remains primarily a disease of birds with limited ability to cause illness in humans, the possibility remains that it – or some other new, or mutated virus - could at some time in the future develop an ability to spread readily between humans and lead to widespread disease worldwide.

We recognise that pandemic flu planning is high on the agenda of Local Resilience Forums and that much work has already been undertaken at local level. This letter provides an update on the guidance available to assist local planning in the wider non-health sector and the additional guidance expected to be issued over the coming months – see Annex A. We will also be keeping you in touch with developments through circulation of 'Flu news' which the Department of Health will be issuing regularly to the NHS and we will issue through the Local Response Gateway.

Our focus over the coming months will be to complete planning (as far as possible and feasible given evolution of the science and policy advice) in preparation for the national exercise of pandemic preparedness plans to be held on 19 and 20 February 2007 (for which planning has recently started, led by the Department of Health). The exercise will test plans and arrangements at national, regional and local resilience levels. **We would therefore recommend that plans and arrangements are in place, as far as possible, at regional and local level in time for the national exercise.** As a guide, this would suggest that plans are prepared or updated by the end of November and that training and local table top exercises are carried out in December/January.

As outlined in the Cabinet Office guidance 'Contingency planning for a possible influenza pandemic' (first issued in February 2006, and updated in July 2006), the main areas of local planning are:

- a. **Business continuity planning** by each organisation to sustain essential services during a pandemic.
- b. Co-ordinated multi-agency planning to support central Government in **communicating public messages** on hygiene measures to reduce risk of infection and its spread.
- c. Co-ordinated multi-agency planning to consider how to implement, where appropriate, possible **social measures** which the Government may recommend on an advisory basis to reduce the risk to individuals of infection.
- d. Co-ordinated multi-agency planning in Local Resilience Forums to prepare for the **wider impacts** of a pandemic in their areas.
- e. Co-ordinated **multi-agency planning with the health service** consistent with any guidance from the Department of Health and devolved equivalents.
- f. Co-ordinated multi-agency planning for handling **excess deaths**.

Guidance is available (see Annex A) to assist planning across **a. to e.**, subject to regular updating and refinement. Guidance on handling excess deaths (**f.**)

is under development and is expected to be issued over the coming months. In the meantime, local business continuity planning for excess deaths should include surveying what capacity there might be, in addition to usual caseloads, and exploring how that capacity could be increased where necessary. The overall aim is to minimise funeral delays, whilst treating those who have died with dignity and their families with respect. We are aware that local planning is underway and urge planners to use the planning assumptions in the Cabinet Office's 'Contingency planning for a possible influenza pandemic' (see Annex A).

Over the coming months, further guidance to assist local planning is also expected on health care in the community setting, access to antiviral drugs, face masks, social care¹, and triggers for closing and re-opening schools.

You may also wish to be aware that the Department of Health is currently reviewing the October 2005 version of the UK Health Departments' Influenza Contingency Plan to ensure that it reflects, as far as possible, the latest scientific advice and planning presumptions. The aim is to ensure that the updated version is available later this year to inform the national exercise. The Department of Health is also considering rolling out a campaign in the autumn to encourage good respiratory hygiene habits in the population. You may hear more about this over the coming months, including the ways in which your organisations could help.

I am happy to respond to any queries and to provide further advice.

LIZ MCINTOSH

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Civil Contingencies Secretariat

Local response gateway: preparing together

¹ On 27 July, the Department of Health wrote to local authority chief executives, directors of social services and emergency planners plus influenza pandemic coordinators in SHAs and PCTs. The letter indicated that DH intended 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.

SOURCES OF GUIDANCE

1. UK Health Departments' Influenza Contingency Plan (October 2005), plus further information for the public as well as information and operational guidance for the NHS. This is listed below. This material is available via the Department of Health's website - <http://www.dh.gov.uk/pandemicflu>.
2. Contingency planning for a possible influenza pandemic (first issued by Cabinet Office in February 2006; updated July 2006) - <http://www.ukresilience.info>.
3. Pandemic Influenza Checklist For Businesses (issued by Cabinet Office in May 2006) – <http://www.ukresilience.info>.
4. HSE Guidance to employers, available via the HSE website - <http://www.hse.gov.uk/biosafety/diseases/influenza.htm>).
5. DfES Guidance to schools and child-care settings (July 2006) – <http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/healthandsafety/Influenza/>
6. Generic guidance to assist business continuity planning, at Chapter 6 of *Emergency Preparedness*, statutory guidance issued under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004. This material is available at the UK Resilience website - http://www.ukresilience.info/ccact/ep_chap_06.pdf.

Additional Advice Available on the DH Website

<http://www.dh.gov.uk/PolicyAndGuidance/EmergencyPlanning/PandemicFlu/fs/en>

General information

7. **Explaining pandemic flu** (October 2005)
A guide from the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) for healthcare professionals and the public.
8. **Key facts (October 2005)**
Key facts on pandemic influenza, its causes, and preparations for it.
9. **Important information for you and your family** (October 2005)
This leaflet describes pandemic flu, the risk of it occurring in this country, what makes it different from the 'ordinary' flu we get every winter, and what the UK is doing to prepare for a possible influenza pandemic.
10. **Frequently asked questions** (October 2005)
Answers to commonly asked questions about the likely impact on society.

Further advice and guidance on contingency planning

- 11. Operational guidance for health service planners (May 2005)**
- 12. UK operational framework for stockpiling, distributing and using antiviral medicines in the event of pandemic influenza (September 2005)**
- 13. Clinical guidelines for patients with an influenza-like illness during an influenza pandemic (October 2005)**
- 14. Guidance for pandemic influenza: infection control in hospitals and primary care settings (October 2005)**
- 15. Wales Framework for Managing Major Infectious Disease Emergencies (October 2005)**