

Swine Flu Pandemic – Risk Management Advice

After many years of discussion about the risks associated with a pandemic flu, swine flu has reached the UK. CARE has prepared this document to offer guidance to our clients following a series of enquiries as to how best to manage your exposure. This guidance should be read in conjunction with the official government guidance issued for personal and business protection.

What is Swine Flu?

Swine Flu, or Influenza A (H1N1), is a pandemic flu. A pandemic flu varies from normal flu in that no 'cure' is available and no-one will have immunity to it. Pandemic flu can spread very quickly from person to person and the situation is being closely monitored by the World Health Organisation.

For the latest figures of swine flu cases nationally and locally within the UK please visit:

http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Swineflu/DG_177831

Whilst pandemic flu can represent a serious risk, it should be noted that at this stage, the risk to the general population is relatively low and treatments such as Tamiflu exist to 'ease' symptoms. The most common infections are children of school or pre-school age.

What risks might my organisation be exposed to?

Pandemic flu spreads quickly, with confirmed or suspected cases requiring to stay in isolation. This leads to three key areas of exposure to the healthcare sector: staffing, service users and premises.

1 Staffing

Healthcare operators, in particular community care providers, are at a heightened risk of pandemic flu. This is because of their potential exposure to large groups of people. Staff members reporting in ill should telephone NHS Direct on 0845 4647 or their local GP surgery. Staff should be encouraged not to go into the community or to travel until a medical professional's advice is provided.

As a business you should consider:

- How to manage a potential shortage of staff with little notice. For example, ensuring bank staff are ready and fit to work.
- How the short term loss of senior management could be controlled with contingency planning.
- How you will manage rota changes that happen dramatically and rapidly.
- How to manage the situation where an employee develops symptoms at one of your sites, or at a location where care is being delivered.
- How you will trace who has been in contact with the infected individual and how to manage their transition into appropriate care and/or monitoring.

2 Service Users

Pandemic flu can affect everyone. However, vulnerable persons such as the ill, older persons and younger persons are particularly at risk. Any person using your services that develops symptoms should begin a series of risk reduction actions, including:

- Where possible, the individual should be kept in isolation.
- A medical professional should be contacted in order to assess the situation and, where necessary, arrange for the appropriate tests and referral to other agencies in order to reduce and prevent further spread.
- Tracing who has been in contact with the infected individual and how to manage their transition into appropriate care and/or monitoring.

3 Premises

If a serious outbreak should occur, it is likely that your premises may be put into isolation or closed. This would generally be a decision made by government agencies and is not your decision as a business. This can lead to a number of problems:

- If possible, where service users that are assessed as fit to continue in your care, consider if you have alternate accommodation for service users.
- Consider potential business interruption costs and how these may be minimised. Your business continuity plan should be a good starting reference point.
- Consult your insurance professionals in order to assess where cover may apply. Most policies will not cover sickness, but some may offer a limited cover for infectious diseases that apply at a location where both care and accommodation are offered.

Where can I go for assistance?

A number of bodies are helpful in providing guidance for pandemic flu. Some key contacts are:

- **Directgov:**
<https://www.pandemicflu.direct.gov.uk/>
0800 1 513 513
- **United Kingdom Home Care Association:**
<http://www.ukhca.co.uk/flu/>
- **National health Service:**
<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Pandemic-flu/Pages/Introduction.aspx>

CARE also offers a range of risk management assistance, including business continuity planning. Should you wish to discuss any such services, **please contact Glenn Trafford on freephone 0800 328 7213.**