



PANDEMIC INFLUENZA HEALTH GUIDANCE

What is Pandemic Influenza

Influenza (flu) is a familiar infection in the UK, especially during the winter months. The illness, caused by an influenza virus, can be mild or severe and can at times lead to death.

Generally, some groups of people are more susceptible than others especially the elderly, young children and people with certain health conditions. This is why the flu vaccination is given to these groups of people every year.

Pandemic flu is different from ordinary flu because it occurs when a new influenza virus emerges into the human population and spreads from person to person worldwide.

As it is a new virus, the entire population will be susceptible because no one will have any immunity to it. Therefore healthy adults as well as the elderly, young children and people with existing medical conditions will be affected. The lack of immunity in the UK population will mean that the virus has the potential to spread very quickly between people. This will result in many more people becoming severely ill and many more deaths.

The circumstances exist now for a new influenza virus to emerge and spread worldwide. Although a pandemic has not yet started, experts warn that it could be soon. It is most likely that the new virus will arise from an avian (bird) flu virus mixing with an ordinary human flu virus and becoming able to infect people.

Signs and Symptoms of Influenza

Most Significant

- Fever
- Cough or shortness of breath
- Sudden onset of illness

Other Symptoms

- Headache
- Malaise
- Chills
- Aching muscles
- Sore throat
- Runny nose and sneezing
- Loss of appetite

Incubation period (time between contact with the virus and the onset of symptoms)

The range is from one to seven days but for most people it is two to three days.



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Infectious Period (how long you are infectious to others)

Adults: from 12 hours before the onset of symptoms until about 5 days after.

Children: from about 12 hours before the onset of symptoms until about 7 days after.

It is likely that the signs and symptoms of pandemic flu will be the same as for ordinary flu but they will probably be more severe and cause more serious complications.

How is pandemic flu caught and spread to others?

Pandemic flu is spread from person to person by close contact.

Here are some examples of how the infection can be spread.

- Infected individuals can pass the virus to others through large droplets when coughing, sneezing and even talking within a close distance (usually 3 feet or less).
- The virus can be passed on by direct contact with an infected individual. Shaking or holding hands with an infected individual followed by touching your own mouth, eyes or nose without first washing your hands with soap and water will also allow the virus to spread to you.
- The influenza virus can be spread when environmental and inanimate objects, such as door handles, light switches and handles on public transport become contaminated with the virus. Once again, if a person touches these objects and then touches his or her mouth, eyes or nose without first washing their hands with soap and water, their chances of catching the virus are increased.
- In some circumstances, the virus can also be passed on in fine airborne droplets or on dust particles. This is not considered to be a major route of transmission.

What you can do to protect yourself and others from Pandemic flu at work.

- Cover your nose and mouth when sneezing and coughing and use disposable single-use tissues for wiping/blowing nose. Dispose of used tissues in nearest waste receptacle.
- Washing your hands after coughing, sneezing, using tissues or contact with respiratory secretions and contaminated objects will reduce the risk of spreading flu to others.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth with contaminated hands.



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How can you help protect your family at home?

You and other members of your family, especially children, may be exposed to the influenza virus at school, in the workplace, using public transport or through the general contact with other members of the public.

The following precautions will help reduce the risks.

- Always wash your hands with soap and water before you leave work and as soon as you arrive home, especially if you have been using public transport.
- Contaminated clothing could transmit the virus, so you may wish to consider having a change of clothes for work during the pandemic. These clothes can be washed in a domestic washing machine separately from other items – ideally in a wash temperature of 65-71°C or as hot as the fabric will tolerate. Tumble dry if possible and then iron. Store and transport garments in a plastic bag.

What you should do if you have symptoms or are ill.

If you feel ill whilst at work, report it immediately to your employer. Do not simply carry on working.

If you develop symptoms whilst off duty:

- Stay at home. Do not go into work.
- Phone your employer
- Seek advice from NHS Direct on 0845 4647 or your GP.

Being Prepared

It is a virtual certainty that if a flu pandemic starts, it will eventually affect the UK. You can be prepared by:

- Understanding how the virus can be transmitted.
- Understanding how to protect yourself and others.
- Practicing strict standards of personal hygiene before the pandemic starts.