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## Viewpoint

**Professor Lindsey Davies, National Director of Pandemic Influenza Preparedness, introduces a special edition Flu News to highlight progress with the UK response to the recent outbreak of swine flu.**

Welcome to this very special edition of Pandemic Flu News. As the more observant may have noticed, we've skipped a month. The April edition was, in fact, ready to print the day the swine flu outbreak was announced, and it became quickly apparent that it would be out of date before it reached readers. This demonstrates an important point in itself – the situation with swine flu is evolving rapidly and we will need to continue to plug gaps in our knowledge and information as we address the current outbreak.

A huge amount of work has been done since the swine flu outbreak was confirmed and WHO raised the pandemic alert level first to Phase 4 and then to Phase 5. I'd like to thank everyone for their long hours and dedicated and patient work under very challenging

circumstances. There is a range of possible future scenarios, so we need to have a number of clinical and operational options ready to deal with them. In this edition of Flu News we update you on some of the work that has already been undertaken – including our latest strategic approach and the national door drop and public information response.

*"I'd like to thank everyone for their long hours and dedicated and patient work under very challenging circumstances"*

You will have also heard that Ian Dalton, currently Chief Executive of NHS North East, has been appointed National Director for NHS Flu Resilience. Ian will be working with the existing pandemic influenza teams to ensure that the NHS is in the best possible

position to protect the population, should swine flu develop into a major outbreak. My role as National Director of Pandemic Influenza Preparedness continues as before and I look forward to working with Ian and his team.

The old army saying has it that 'no battle plan survives contact with the enemy'. A good plan is both robust and flexible enough to meet changing circumstances as they emerge. What the past fortnight has demonstrated is that our plans do indeed have that flexibility, and this gives us confidence that we can continue to deal effectively with swine flu as the situation unfolds.

If you have any queries on this month's articles or the planning process in general, please write to us at [pandemicflu@dh.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:pandemicflu@dh.gsi.gov.uk)

*Lindsey Davies*

**Professor Lindsey Davies**



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# Health and social care organisations: revised strategy

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## The strategy for health and social care organisations in England has been revised in light of the evolving situation regarding the current swine flu outbreak.

At present, there is no evidence that the swine flu virus is currently causing widespread infection or serious complications to patients in the UK. However, the situation is being reviewed daily and it could change.

Therefore, the following actions are recommended across the NHS and social care sectors:

- the current containment phase, including contact tracing and prophylaxis of all close contacts of positive cases, should be continued by the Health Protection Agency (HPA), with NHS support, until there is clear evidence of sustained community transmission or there are

large numbers of new cases with no direct links to known flu patients

- during this containment phase, health and social care workers should continue to receive post-exposure antiviral prophylaxis if they have been in close clinical contact with a patient who has been confirmed as positive.

Further advice will be issued as the situation continues to evolve. When one of the trigger points is reached, we will need to ensure that the right people get the right treatment at the right time, keeping the impact on the NHS to a minimum. A number of options could be brought into play as part of the National Flu service, depending on the way the virus is behaving and its impact on the population. These include:

- PCTs may need to enact their local Antiviral Collection Points (ACPs) to provide access to antivirals

- web and telephone services may be used to assist the public to access antiviral medication. These are currently in development but will not be used until we are confident of their resilience.

In the meantime, it's important that local preparations for ACPs continue so that they can be set up quickly if we need them. Detailed guidance is being issued imminently.

For further information please contact:  
[janet.meacham@dh.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:janet.meacham@dh.gsi.gov.uk)



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## Public information campaign

**Swine flu information leaflets have been delivered to every home in the UK.**

Postal distribution of the 'Important information about swine flu' leaflet began on 5 May 2009. The leaflet is supported by extensive TV, radio and newspaper advertisement campaigns, press and broadcast work by Ministers and senior officials, and a wealth of online information to educate the public about the swine flu virus.

The current public information materials build on the work done during the season flu outbreak in emphasising the importance of good respiratory and hand hygiene. The public is also advised on how to recognise the symptoms of swine flu and how they should seek further help.

The leaflet is available from NHS Choices in alternative formats, such as large print and alternative languages.

Additionally, the Swine Flu Information Line has now been activated. This is a recorded telephone service, intended to back up the messages in the leaflet, and which provides up-to-date information about swine flu and the healthcare response.

### Links and Info

**Swine Flu information line:**  
**0800 1 513 513**

**Direct.gov swine flu resources**

**NHS Choices resources  
(including leaflet download)**

**Public door drop leaflet in  
alternative formats**





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## Public messages

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**The advice to the public urges them to contact NHS Choices in the first instance if they think they may have swine flu, and refrain from visiting their GPs or A&E department.**

What the public should do if they think they have the symptoms of swine flu:

**1st:** Visit the NHS Choices website ([www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)) for information and FAQs about swine flu. There is also an online flu symptom checker on both [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk) and the NHS Direct website ([www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk)).

**2nd:** Ring the national Swine Flu Information Line (0800 1 513 513). This provides pre-recorded information about swine flu.

**3rd:** Call the NHS Direct telephone service (0845 4647). Callers with flu-like symptoms, who have internet access, will be asked to try the online flu symptom checker first. If necessary, they will be able to request a call back from an advisor. Otherwise callers are asked to hold to speak to someone who can help.

**4th:** Contact their GP over the phone.



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## Public research

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### **Initial public-facing research shows an encouragingly high level of understanding of swine flu, and of respiratory and hand hygiene issues.**

The Department of Health regularly commissions research into public reactions to healthcare campaigns and issues and we have started to include questions about swine flu in this work.

We expect the initial survey to be repeated on a weekly basis. It canvassed the views of 1,173 UK adults from 1 to 3 May, before the door drop leaflet commenced distribution.

Ninety-six percent of those questioned said they had heard of swine flu and a sizeable majority said they had seen TV, radio, or newspaper advertising on the subject. A majority also agreed that the Government is well prepared for a swine flu pandemic and expressed satisfaction with the level of information received.

There is some public confusion over the availability of a vaccine and natural immunity, with many people believing there is already a vaccine and/or that most of the population will have some immunity. As previous research suggested, GPs are regarded as the most trustworthy source of information.

Self-care messages surrounding the use of disposal tissues and hand washing appear to be getting through, with a sizeable majority recognising the importance of respiratory and hand hygiene in slowing the spread of the flu virus. Most of the public accept that wearing a face mask is unlikely to be an effective response.

Subsequent research will establish how public attitudes are changing both in response to the trajectory of the outbreak and information campaigns such as the national door drop.

For further information please contact  
[stuart.notholt@dh.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:stuart.notholt@dh.gsi.gov.uk)



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## Advice on exclusions from schools and workplaces

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**Following the closure of some schools as a precautionary measure, where probable or confirmed cases of swine flu have occurred, the Health Protection Agency would like to provide the following advice for the public. This advice relates to the current situation, while our knowledge of the virus is limited and our strategy is to delay and reduce onward transmission of the illness. Such advice may change as our understanding of the virus improves.**

- The only people who need to refrain from their normal activities (such as going to school or work) are:
  - those who have been confirmed as having swine flu;
  - those who are being investigated as a possible\* or probable\*\* case of swine flu (also see second main bullet point below); or
  - those who have been attending a school where a case is found to have been present

and have symptoms of the illness (a possible case).

- Anyone who is being investigated as a possible case of swine flu (which means they meet the epidemiological criteria and have symptoms) will be given antiviral medicine and will be asked to stay at home and limit their contact with other people until the test results are available.
- Close contacts of probable or confirmed cases (family, friends or otherwise) will be started on antiviral medicine as a precautionary measure but can continue their normal lives so long as they do not have any clinical symptoms.
- Children and adults who have no symptoms but have had contact with probable or confirmed cases in social community settings do not need to be excluded from either

school or the workplace. They should continue their normal daily routines.

\* *Possible case: patient meets the epidemiological criteria and has symptoms*

\*\* *Probable case: patient meets the epidemiological criteria, has symptoms, and results of initial testing suggest swine flu*

It is important to remember that flu is usually spread from one person to another when an infected person has symptoms (i.e. coughing and sneezing).

General infection control practices and good respiratory hand hygiene can help to reduce transmission of all viruses, including swine flu. This includes:

- Covering your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing, using a tissue when possible.



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- Disposing of dirty tissues promptly and carefully.
- Maintaining good basic hygiene, for example washing hands frequently with soap and water to reduce the spread of the virus from your hands to face or to other people.
- Cleaning hard surfaces (e.g. door handles) frequently using a normal cleaning product.
- Making sure your children follow this advice.

### Links and Info

[View HPA advice](#)



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- WHO changed the pandemic flu alert to WHO Phase 5 on 29 April 2009. Phase 5 indicates that WHO believes a global pandemic may be imminent.
- Confirmed cases of swine flu are mostly concentrated in Mexico, the USA and Canada, however cases have spread to several European countries, particularly Spain and the UK, as well as elsewhere in the world. WHO continues to work with partners in Mexico to determine why they are seeing more severe cases than elsewhere.
- Outside of Mexico, those infected with the virus have generally experienced mild symptoms and made a full recovery.
- The viruses characterised so far have been sensitive to the antiviral drugs Tamiflu (oseltamivir) and Relenza (zanamivir). The UK has a stockpile of these drugs sufficient to cover 50 percent of the population.
- Information leaflets on swine flu began to be delivered to every home in the UK on Tuesday 5 May 2009. There are also TV, radio and press advertisements and a wealth of information online to further educate the public about the virus.
- The swine flu information line is operational: 0800 1 513 513
- Orders have been placed for 226 million face masks and 34 million respirators, which will be delivered over the coming months.
- Plans have been announced to increase the UK antiviral stockpile from 33.5 million to 50 million.

**Please note, this report was accurate at 17:00 5 May 2009. Please check the HPA and Department of Health (DH) websites for updates.**

### Links and Info

[HPA website](#)

[DH website](#)

[Current WHO phase of pandemic alert](#)