



Churches Action for the Homeless

SWINE FLU

Policy & Guidelines for Staff

Last Updated: 28 July 2009

A copy of this booklet is available on the CATH website (www.cath-org.co.uk)

SWINE FLU Policy & Guidelines

INTRODUCTION

Flu is a familiar infection in the UK, especially during the winter months. The illness, caused by the flu virus, can be mild or severe and, occasionally, can lead to death. Generally, some groups of people are more susceptible to the complications of flu than others, especially older people and people of any age with certain medical conditions. This is why the seasonal flu vaccination is recommended to these groups of people each year.

Swine flu is a respiratory disease and has some elements of a virus found in pigs. There is no evidence of this disease circulating in pigs in the UK and scientists are investigating its origins.

Swine flu has been confirmed in a number of countries and it is spreading from human to human, which could lead to what is referred to as a pandemic flu outbreak. Pandemic flu is different from ordinary flu because it's a new flu virus that appears in humans and spreads very quickly from person to person worldwide. The World Health Organization (WHO) is closely monitoring cases of swine flu globally and has recently declared swine flu as a pandemic disease with the emphasis now having moved from controlling the spread of the disease to treatment and isolation of those suffering from it.

A pandemic is a worldwide epidemic. Pandemic flu is different from seasonal flu because it occurs when a new flu virus emerges into the human population to which most people will be susceptible and which can be spread easily from person to person worldwide – all countries will be affected. This will result in many more people becoming severely ill and potentially many more deaths than occur due to seasonal flu.

Because it's a new virus, no one will have immunity to it and everyone could be at risk of catching it. This includes healthy adults as well as older people, young children and those with existing medical conditions.

In the course of its work, CATH has contact with many individuals with the chances of CATH's staff, service users and volunteers contracting the illness fairly high. Whilst we cannot simply close the organization until the swine flu pandemic passes, we can and must make sure that sensible measures are taken to reduce the spread of the illness and ensure that vital services are maintained for those service users most in need.

This policy therefore outlines how CATH will deal with the swine flu pandemic.

You are recommended to download the government leaflet on Swine Flu from:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/924/0080910.pdf>

HOW DOES SWINE FLU SPREAD?

Flu viruses are made up of tiny particles that can be spread through the droplets that come out of your nose and mouth when you cough or sneeze. When you cough or sneeze without covering your nose and mouth with a tissue, those droplets can spread and others will be at risk of breathing them in.

If you cough or sneeze into your hand, those droplets and the germs in them are then easily spread from your hand to any hard surfaces that you touch, and they can live on those surfaces for some time. Everyday items such as door handles, computer keyboards, mobile and ordinary phones and the TV remote control are all common surfaces where flu viruses can be found. If other people touch these surfaces and then touch their faces, the germs can enter their systems and they can become infected. That's how all cold and flu viruses, including swine flu, are passed on from person to person.

WHAT CAN I DO TO PROTECT MYSELF AND OTHERS AGAINST FLU?

The best thing you can do to protect yourself is to follow good hygiene practices. These will help to slow the spread of the virus and will be the single most effective thing you can do to protect yourself and others from infection.

When you cough or sneeze it is especially important to follow the rules of good hygiene to prevent the spread of germs:

- ◆ **Always carry tissues.**
- ◆ **Use clean tissues to cover your mouth and nose when you cough and sneeze.**
- ◆ **Bin the tissues after one use.**
- ◆ **Wash your hands with soap and hot water or a sanitiser gel often.**
- ◆ **Clean hard surfaces such as door handles, tables etc often**

There's a simple way to remember this:
CATCH IT, BIN IT, KILL IT.

Every CATH project has a supply of sanitiser gel, soap and tissues. If the stocks of these getting low, it is the responsibility of every member of staff to bring this to the attention of the line manager who will ensure new stocks are ordered. It is also everybody's responsibility to ensure that service users follow the simple principles of good hygiene wherever possible.

DO I NEED A FACE MASK?

You may have seen face masks being given out to the public in other countries on the news. There is little evidence that facemasks will make any difference for healthy people in public places. Masks are only effective if they are of an appropriate type, worn correctly, changed frequently, removed properly and disposed of safely.

The Scottish Government has procured a stockpile of facemasks and respirators for frontline healthcare workers who are dealing with symptomatic patients. These staff have been trained in the use of facemasks. It is important to try and protect the sectors of society that need to support and care for those who will suffer from the virus.

CATH will not be issuing face masks to staff, volunteers or service users as a precaution against swine flu alone. We may issue face masks to certain projects to reduce the risk of contamination if a service user contracts the virus and is staying at the project.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS AND WHAT SHOULD I DO?

It is important that as swine flu spreads, you are alert to the symptoms of the disease so you can recognise it in yourself and others early. Please read this section and consider your symptoms carefully before calling NHS 24 or going to your GP (see below)

You may wish to call the National Swine Flu Information Line to check your symptoms before calling your GP or NHS24: 0800 1 513 513

So far, the vast majority of swine flu cases have been mild, with symptoms similar to those of seasonal flu. Only in a small number of cases have people had more serious symptoms. If you or a member of your family has any of the following symptoms and a temperature of 38°C and above or feels hot, you may have swine flu.

The typical symptoms are:

- sudden fever (a high body temperature of 38°C/100.4°F or above), and
- sudden cough.

Other symptoms may include:

- headache,
- tiredness,
- chills,
- aching muscles,
- limb or joint pain,
- sore throat,
- diarrhoea or stomach upset
- runny nose,
- sneezing, and
- loss of appetite.

It is worth making sure you have a working thermometer at home, as an increase in temperature is a key symptom. If you are still concerned you may have swine flu:

- Stay at home and check your symptoms using the NHS24 service (08454 24 24 24).
- Call your GP directly if:
 - you have a serious underlying illness,
 - you are pregnant,
 - you have a sick child under one year of age,
 - your condition **suddenly** gets much worse, or
 - your condition is still getting worse after seven days (five for a child).

WHAT DO I DO IF I HAVE THE SYMPTOMS?

In England, there is a new National Pandemic Flu Service which is dealing remotely with people who suspect they may have swine flu.

In Scotland, the health services NHS24 and the local GP Network believe they can cope with the anticipated demand and therefore, if you develop the symptoms of swine flu you should:

- **contact your local GP**
- **or NHS24 on 08454 24 24 24**

'FLU FRIENDS'

Some of the advice available is recommending that everyone establishes a network of 'flu friends'. These are people who are able to act on your behalf to go to the doctor's surgery, the pharmacist etc. if you get swine flu. The reasoning is that people with swine flu should stay at home to reduce the risk of infecting other people.

There is not yet any specific information about 'flu friends' in Scotland, however it makes good sense to identify now people who could be your flu friends if necessary.

HIGH-RISK GROUPS

For the vast majority of people, swine flu is a mild illness.

Some people find that they get better by staying in bed, drinking plenty of water and taking over-the-counter flu medication. However, some groups of people are more at risk of serious illness if they catch swine flu, and will need to start taking antiviral medication as soon as they are confirmed with the illness.

Scientists are still learning more about the risk profile of the virus, but it is already known that the following people are particularly susceptible:

- ◆ people with:
 - chronic lung disease,
 - chronic heart disease,
 - chronic kidney disease,
 - chronic liver disease,
 - chronic neurological disease (neurological disorders include motor neurone disease, multiple sclerosis and Parkinson's disease),
 - immunosuppression (whether caused by disease or treatment) and
 - diabetes mellitus,
- ◆ patients who have had drug treatment for asthma within the past three years,
- ◆ pregnant women,
- ◆ people aged 65 years and older, and
- ◆ young children under five years old.

It is vital that people in these higher-risk groups who catch swine flu get antivirals and start taking them as soon as possible.

CATH does not wish to put any member of one of the high risk groups mentioned above at increased risk. If you consider yourself to be at higher risk, please make sure that both your line manager and Elaine Lamb (e.lamb@cath-org.co.uk) are aware of the details.

IS THERE A VACCINATION I CAN HAVE?

Not at this stage. This type of flu is not the same as seasonal flu: it involves a completely new type of virus. The vaccine will take several months to produce and distribute. The UK governments have agreements in place with manufacturers so that we can get stocks as soon as possible after a vaccine has been developed.

When a vaccine becomes commonly available, CATH will work with local healthcare services to ensure that all staff know how to get vaccinated. This is likely to be via your own GP. CATH is unlikely to have any special arrangements in place.

OUTLOOK

For most people, the illness appears to be mild and self-limiting. Cases have been confirmed in all age groups, but children and younger people seem much more likely to be affected, whereas fewer cases have been confirmed to date in older adults.

For a minority of people, the virus has caused severe illness. In many, but not all, of these cases underlying risk factors have been identified that are likely to have contributed to the severity of the condition.

Worldwide, just over 0.4% of the laboratory-confirmed cases reported to the World Health Organization (WHO) have died, which would be a rate consistent with that normally observed with seasonal influenza. However, the

true number of swine flu cases is likely to be significantly higher than that reported to WHO and therefore the figure of 0.4% is likely to be an overestimate of the death rate.

Where complications do occur, they tend to be caused by the virus affecting the lungs. Infections such as pneumonia can develop.

DO I COME TO WORK IF I HAVE SWINE FLU SYMPTOMS?

NO!

As with any other illness, you should telephone your line manager as soon as possible to let them know you are unable to work.

Follow the guidelines above to check you have swine flu and to get treatment.

Do not return to work until you are symptom free.

WHAT FORMS DO I FILL IN IF I'M OFF BECAUSE OF SWINE FLU?

For most people, the illness passes within 7 days. For the first 7 days of absence from work due to illness you should complete a CATH self-certificate on your return, available from your line manager, Imelda Ramage (I.ramage@cath-org.co.uk) or Elaine Lamb. This is normal CATH practice.

People diagnosed with swine flu in Scotland are not being advised not to go to their GP, therefore a doctor's certificate of illness, if your illness lasts for more than 7 days should still be sought.

If you are off work for more than 7 days with swine flu, on your return to work you should therefore still complete a CATH self certificate for the first 7 days AND have already sent in your doctor's certificate for any period of sickness over and above the initial 7 days. If you have not already sent in a doctor's certificate then attach it to your self-certificate.

You will not be paid for any period of absence due to illness which is not covered by either a self certificate or a doctor's certificate.

DO I COME TO WORK IF I'VE HAD CONTACT WITH SOMEONE WITH SWINE FLU?

YES!

Swine flu is only contagious when the symptoms are present. If you have the symptoms of swine flu then you should not come to work. If you do not have the symptoms then you should come to work.

CATH anticipates that at any one time, we may have a number of people off work with swine flu (and other illnesses) and in order to keep our services being delivered we will need every member of staff to act responsibly in order to mitigate the pressure on each and every project.

DO I COME TO WORK IF A FAMILY MEMBER HAS SWINE FLU?

YES!

CATH will make every effort to ensure that family circumstances are taken in to account and will consider each case on its merits. If, for example, you are the sole carer of a child with swine flu then, like with any other illness, CATH will do its best to work round any days off you may have to take. These days will normally be considered 'compassionate leave' and are at the discretion of your line manager.

The important thing is to keep us informed!

HOW WILL THE PROJECTS COPE WITH STAFF ABSENCES?

We're going to need your help to make sure our most vulnerable service users are OK.

Some of the information available predicts that there could be staff shortages in all businesses of up to 30% for a two week period and up to 20% for an extended seven week period over the coming months. CATH therefore appreciates that some projects may need to temporarily close due to there being insufficient staff cover. Every project in CATH has a 'rule' that at least two staff must be on-site at all times when service users are present. For CATH House and Tayview House, this means that 24 hr a day cover is required. In order to ensure that this is possible given the anticipated increase in staff sickness, the order in which projects will close is as follows:-

1. Balhary
2. Day Centre, including Youth and Literacy
3. Outreach
4. Floating Support
5. CATH House
6. Tayview House
7. OST (If required, OST staff will work in any project at any time but OST will not necessarily 'close')

Using this priority list, available staff in projects above those which need cover will be called upon, and expected, to cover absences due to illness. CATH will try to ensure that there is at least 24 hrs notice given to any staff member asked to provide cover but you should appreciate that this may not always be possible. Every employment contract contains the provision for every employee to work in a project which is not their normal place of work. Whilst CATH appreciates that all our staff give generously of their time already, these are extenuating circumstances and reasons not to cover other projects when requested should both be genuine and verifiable (eg hospital appointment etc).

Every CATH staff member has undergone an Enhanced Disclosure and has been assessed as being 'fit for role' to work with vulnerable people. Whilst we appreciate that most staff do not have experience in every project, we know that all our staff have the commitment and common sense to be able to do their best when asked to work in any of our projects.

So, for example, if CATH House needs 2 people to cover a night shift, Sue or Michelle would call on Balhary first, then the Day Centre, then Outreach etc until the 2 people were found. This may result in a suspension of services in Balhary, the Day Centre etc.

If you provide cover for a project which is not your normal place of work, you will be paid for the hours worked at your normal hourly rate.

Provision should be made at all projects to make sure service users are aware of the possibility of any temporary closures as well as any actual closures.

For further details, please contact your line manager.

WHAT IF A SERVICE USER GETS SWINE FLU?

You should treat anyone with swine flu with the same respect, dignity and compassion as you would any other ill service user.

CATH workers may need to act as 'flu friends' for any of our service users who contract swine flu, particularly in the accommodation projects.

The principles of good hygiene will be especially important when (and if) a service user contracts swine flu so you will need to make sure that after every contact with the person that you wash your hands or use sanitiser gel to reduce the risk of passing the virus on to others.

The person may not want to leave their room, but if they do and they are still symptomatic it may be advisable to make arrangements so that they come in to contact with as few non-symptomatic people as possible. This may mean taking meals and refreshments to their room, making sure (in the case of CATH House) that they are not sharing with anyone etc.

It is appreciated that the alcohol misuse issues experienced by some of our service users may mean that they feel they must leave the accommodation in order to have a drink. It is up to every individual worker to assess the relative risk of this and make a decision based on the circumstances at the time. This may mean, in order to prevent more serious health consequences that an 'emergency drink' may be issued.

How each project deals with service users who contract swine flu should be discussed at team meetings and with your line manager. CATH will do its best to comply with any reasonable request for equipment or resources required. The basic principles for any measures should be:-

- **Be vigilant to signs and symptoms of swine flu in others as well as yourself**
- **Treat the person, not the illness**
- **Reduce the risk of cross contamination**
- **Use your common sense!**

REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed periodically but it is anticipated that the provisions contained herein will remain in place until at least June 2010.