

SWINE FLU – WORKFORCE ISSUES

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Introduction

This document is designed to provide guidance to staff and Managers in the form of frequently asked questions together with the relevant responses on employment and staffing issues arising from the spread of swine flu.

Questions

Sickness & Absence

Q1. If I suspect I have Swine Flu what should I do?

A In the first instance you should call the national pandemic flu service on 0800 1 513 100 or visit www.direct.gov.uk/pandemicflu.

Please do not attend walk-in centres, NHS hospitals or GP practices in person if you have symptoms. If you are prescribed Tamiflu, arrange for someone to pick up the prescription on your behalf from an antiviral collection point (AVCP) Devon PCT has several AVCPs set up around Devon, and you will be advised of your nearest. Remember, Tamiflu is not a vaccine, but will reduce the symptoms, and the length of time you are affected by the virus, by about a day.

You should also follow the normal sickness absence reporting procedures and let your manager know as soon as possible that you are ill and will not be at work. You should advise your manager that you have swine flu or suspected swine flu.

Q2. When is it ok for me to return to work after contracting Swine Flu?

A You should remain off work for a period of at least 7 days after the onset of symptoms. As long as you are symptom free after this period in time, you will no longer be infectious.

Q3. If I become ill at work with suspected swine flu, what should I do?

A You should go off duty and follow the advice detailed in the response to question 1 above.

Q4. My child has swine flu but I am symptom free, should I come in to work?

A. Yes, as long as you are symptom free you should attend work as normal.

Q5. My child has swine flu and although I am symptom free, I need to stay at home to look after my child. Should I report sick?

A. No. Staff should only report sickness if they are personally unwell. If your child is taken suddenly ill, you may qualify for a short period of leave in accordance with the PCT Family, Domestic & Compassionate Leave Policy to enable you to put appropriate care arrangements in place.

Q6. Can I take 'special paid leave' to look after my sick child?

A. As detailed above if your child is taken suddenly ill, you may qualify for a short period of leave in accordance with the PCT Family, Domestic & Compassionate Leave Policy to enable you to put appropriate care arrangements in place. If you need additional support you will need to discuss with your manager options such as taking annual leave, unpaid leave or a temporary period of flexible working.

Q7. Do I need to review my childcare/carer 'contingency' arrangements?

A. Yes. You should start thinking about how pandemic influenza may affect your arrangements. Think about alternative arrangements in the event that your normal care network is not available, such as developing a 'buddy' system with fellow colleagues, for example.

Q8. If I suspect a member of staff is beginning to show swine flu symptoms What should I do?

A. Discuss with individual and check symptoms. The national pandemic flu service on 0800 1 513 100 or website www.direct.gov.uk/pandemicflu can be used to check symptoms.

Q9. A member of the team has swine flu should the whole team now cease visits to patients?

A. No, staff can continue to visit patients as long as they are symptom free.

Working Arrangements

Q10. Will I be issued with personal protective equipment?

A. Yes, if it is appropriate for the work you are undertaking. The algorithm produced by the Health Protection Agency is used to determine this. The up to date algorithm is available on the Flu Response Page on InfoPoint.

Q11. Can I refuse to deal with patients with swine flu?

A. We have a duty to treat and care for patients. Patients will not be routinely admitted to hospital with swine flu and patients experiencing flu symptoms are being encouraged to contact their GP or NHS Direct for advice rather than present to hospitals or MIUs. However there may be situations where a patient with swine flu requires admission to hospital or needs treatment at home. The relevant infection control advice should be followed.

Q12. I am pregnant. Should any modifications be made to my duties to minimise my risk of exposure to swine flu?

- A. Pregnant women are in the 'higher risk' group in respect of swine flu. It is important that you follow infection control advice carefully. Exposure to patients known to have swine flu should be avoided. This may therefore mean modifying your duties and should be discussed with your line manager.
- Q13. I am deemed to be in the higher risk' group (existing respiratory/circulatory condition, pregnant) in respect of swine flu. Should any modifications be made to my duties to minimise my risk of exposure to swine flu?
- A. It important that you follow infection control advice carefully. Exposure to patients known to have swine flu should be avoided. This may therefore mean modifying your duties and should be discussed with your line manager.
- Q14. Will it be necessary to redeploy me in to a different role or different work area?
- A. It may be necessary in the event of severe staffing shortages, or in order to respond to different workloads as a result of the pandemic, to deploy staff into the areas of greatest need.
- Q15. Can I refuse to be redeployed in to a different role or to a different work area?
- A. Pandemic flu is likely to present the PCT and the local healthcare community with significant challenges, and we will therefore expect staff to be flexible. Wherever possible we will seek volunteers but there are likely to be occasions where deployment in to different roles or work areas is mandatory. For example it may be necessary in certain circumstances to temporarily reduce or suspend services in one area and concentrate available resources in another area. This may mean staff are expected to work in different roles, or different areas than normal. Wherever possible, agreement will be reached to match staff with the most appropriate alternative role and location, and all necessary induction and essential training will be provided to ensure staff are able to perform their these temporary roles. If you have particular difficulties or concerns we will work with you to try to resolve these.
- Q16. Could I be asked to work for another NHS organisation?
- A. Yes. During the pandemic it will be extremely important that NHS organisations work closely together to ensure the delivery of critical services. Although unlikely, this could mean staff being deployed to work for a different NHS organisation. If this becomes necessary, a similar approach will be taken as described in answer 15, above.
- Q17. Will I be insured if I work for a different NHS organisation?
- A. Yes, you will be fully indemnified.
- Q18. Could I be deployed to a lower banded role and if so will I retain my current pay band and terms and conditions of service?
- A. Yes you could, but you will not suffer any loss of salary.
- Q.19 If I am deployed in to a more senior role will I receive increased remuneration?

A. In circumstances where a person is working above their pay band for more than 65% of work time, consideration will be given as to whether they should be re-banded on a temporary basis. It may be necessary to make the pay adjustment in the period after the pandemic is over.

Q20. Will I have to work extra hours in the event of staffing shortages?

A. We are currently surveying all our staff to see if in the event of staffing shortages whether they could temporarily increase their contract hours if they work part time or work overtime if needed. The appropriate Agenda for Change remuneration will be paid. There are no plans to make it compulsory for staff to work additional hours. It is hoped that in the event of a crisis there will be sufficient staff who will voluntarily work additional hours or overtime for a short period of time. We have also established a pool of reserve staff who may be called upon to help out during the pandemic.

Miscellaneous

Q21. Can I work from home during a flu outbreak?

A. It may be appropriate and indeed encouraged for some staff groups. However, for many staff home working will not be feasible. For some staff groups it will be essential that they are available in the workplace. This will be agreed with individual staff and their managers.

30th July 2009