

# PANDEMIC FLU

GUIDANCE FOR THE  
HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

A stylized, light blue world map showing the continents of North America, South America, Europe, Africa, and Asia. The map is overlaid with a grid of latitude and longitude lines.

What you need to know  
and how to protect yourself  
and others

Everyone will be involved in the fight against pandemic influenza (flu) in terms of managing the impact it will have on society and preventing further spread of the infection.

This guidance explains what managers and staff in the hospitality industry can do to protect themselves, and their families, their colleagues and guests, to prevent the spread of flu.

## WHAT IS PANDEMIC FLU?

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, at times, can lead to death.

Generally, some groups of people are more susceptible to flu than others especially older people, young children and people with certain medical conditions. This is why the flu vaccination is recommended to these groups of people each year.

Pandemic flu is different from ordinary flu because it occurs when a new flu virus emerges into the human population and spreads from person-to-person worldwide – all countries will be affected.

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 older people, 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 flu 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 the human flu virus and becoming able to infect people.

## SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF FLU

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

**The most significant symptoms are the sudden onset of:**

- Fever
- Cough or shortness of breath

**Other symptoms may include:**

- Headache
- Tiredness
- Chills
- Aching muscles
- Sore throat
- Runny nose
- Sneezing
- Loss of appetite

**The incubation period (time between contact with the virus and the onset of symptoms)**

The range is from one to four days, for most people it will be two to three days.

**The infectious period (how long you are infectious to others)**

People are most infectious soon after they develop symptoms though they can continue to shed the virus, for example in coughs and sneezes, typically for up to five days (seven days in children). People become less infectious as their symptoms subside and once symptoms are gone, they are considered no longer infectious to others.

## WHAT YOU SHOULD YOU DO IF YOU HAVE SYMPTOMS OR ARE ILL

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

If you develop symptoms whilst not at work:

- Stay at home.
- Do not go to work until you are fully recovered.
- Phone your employer or occupational health department.
- For advice and an initial assessment of symptoms, contact the National Flu Line service in the first instance.

## HOW IS PANDEMIC FLU CAUGHT AND SPREAD TO OTHERS?

Flu, including pandemic flu, is spread from person-to-person by close contact. Some examples of how it can be spread include:

- Coughing and/or sneezing by an infected person within a short distance (usually one metre or less) of someone
- Touching or shaking the hand of an infected person and then touching your mouth, eyes or nose without first washing your hands
- Touching surfaces or objects (eg door handles) that have become contaminated with the flu virus and then touching your mouth, eyes or nose without first washing your hands
- In some circumstances, it is thought that the virus may be passed on in fine droplets – aerosols. This is not considered a major route of transmission and is only likely to occur during some medical procedures.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO TO PROTECT YOURSELF AND OTHERS FROM PANDEMIC FLU

- Use a tissue to cover your nose and mouth when coughing and/or sneezing. Dispose of the tissue promptly and then wash your hands
- Wash hands frequently with soap and water, especially after coughing, sneezing, and using tissues. An alcohol handrub could be used as an alternative for cleaning hands
- Avoid touching your mouth, eyes and/or nose, unless you have recently cleaned your hands
- Use normal household detergent and water to clean surfaces frequently touched by hands
- Before you leave work you should wash your hands, and then wash them again soon after you arrive home
- Tissues should be disposed of in domestic waste and do not require any special treatment. Used tissues should be put in a waste bin immediately after use or as soon as is feasible. You should wash your hands after the tissues have been disposed of



## PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE)

- Ensure that you are aware of your employer's procedures regarding PPE and that you are using them correctly
- Use the PPE (usually aprons, surgical masks and gloves) as directed by your manager, when there is a risk of contamination from respiratory secretions
- Whilst the appropriate use of PPE may offer some protection to clothes from contamination, during the pandemic you may wish to consider changing out of your work clothes before travelling home. Work clothes that are washed at home can be washed in a domestic washing machine
- Used PPE can be disposed of in domestic waste, preferably in tied black bags. There is no need for non-healthcare settings to introduce clinical waste procedures for the disposal of PPE during an influenza pandemic

## SPECIFIC ISSUES

### **Guidance for staff and managers**

Staff caring for guests who have flu may benefit from wearing surgical masks, but only when coming into close contact (within one metre) and only if the guest has flu symptoms. Masks should not be worn continuously by staff and should not be seen as a substitute for hand hygiene and other basic precautions. Follow HSE guidance at [www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk) about pandemic influenza precautions in the workplace.

If staff are concerned about the condition of a guest, or if a guest requests access to medical advice, advise them to phone the National Flu Line service for advice and an initial assessment of symptoms in the first instance. If they are very ill, staff may need to contact the relevant general practitioner (GP) on their behalf.

If staff members need to enter the room where a guest is present and has symptoms of influenza (eg to deliver a room service meal), as far as is possible they should avoid close contact (within one metre) with the guest, and clean their hands with soap and water afterwards.

Wearing gloves and gowns is not recommended for staff members not looking after symptomatic guests.

## ROOM DECONTAMINATION

- Staff who clean rooms occupied by ill guests must wear an apron and gloves before cleaning (Personal Protective Equipment (PPE))
- Wearing a face mask is only necessary if the guest is in the room at the same time
- Ventilate the room by opening external windows
- Remove the bed linen and towels and place in a bag
- Do not leave loose items in the hotel corridor
- Dispose of all disposable items such as sachets and toilet rolls
- Clean remaining items such as cups, glasses etc using water and detergent

- Apply your chosen cleaning product and allow as much contact time as possible before wiping clean
- Pay particular attention to hand contact surfaces eg door handles, light switches, telephone handsets, TV remote control, bedside tables
- Use plenty of cleaning cloths to avoid re-contaminating surfaces

## REMOVING AND DISPOSING OF PPE

In order to minimise risk to colleagues from used PPE, it must be removed in a standard manner

- First remove the gloves, by turning them inside out in one single motion; then remove the apron and finally the face mask if worn
- You should avoid touching the front of the mask (by using the ties or tapes)
- Used PPE should be bagged, tied or sealed and disposed of as domestic waste
- After disposing of the PPE in the bin, you should clean your hands with soap and water
- If the hands are not visibly soiled, an alcohol hand rub can be used as an alternative

## MANAGERS

Most guests will be able to remain in the hotel whilst they are ill and will simply require (1) hygiene advice and general care in the hotel and (2) advice about access to medication and medical care if their condition gets worse. Hotels are not expected to provide nursing care or supervision but most hotels have established mechanisms for access to medical advice for guests.

There will almost certainly be some warning of a pandemic before it reaches the UK and your area. At that time, the hospitality industry manager should review the plans made and:

- review the lists of contact details for staff
- check on reports of staff illness at the start of each day
- review plans for dealing with above average levels of staff absence
- ensure that adequate supplies of cleaning materials are readily available (or if you contract others to provide cleaning services, check that they have contingency plans) and that there are procedures for frequent cleaning of hard surfaces
- ensure that handwashing facilities are adequate, accessible and working properly
- ensure that there are stocks of tissues, paper towels and soaps and plastic bags (eg for guest room bins)
- ensure that staff are aware of the relevant procedures and the advice in this document
- ensure that hard surfaces (door handles, light switches, taps, kitchen worktops) are cleaned more frequently than usual, using normal cleaning products
- encourage guests to cover their nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing and sneezing, dispose of this immediately and wash their hands
- ensure that prompt action is taken to clean all areas that may have been soiled by secretions eg toilet facilities in communal areas, with particular attention to water closet compartments and water closet seats, door handles, light switches, taps and anything else that can be touched by hand

- review your plans for coach groups where a passenger shows signs of flu
- review your booking conditions to encourage those who are ill not to travel
- review restaurant service arrangements and avoid self service to reduce the number of people handling the same utensils
- review your check-in arrangements to try and ensure that contact between guests leaving and arriving is minimised
- encourage staff and guests to use their own toilet and washing facilities
- review your communication arrangements because guests will inevitably be concerned if there is illness in the hotel
- be prepared to monitor sales of symptom relieving over-the-counter medication from any onsite shop
- be prepared to investigate cases of people not appearing at scheduled meal times (as guests are often reluctant to report symptoms of illness)
- be prepared to provide hand sanitising stations in critical areas such as toilets and dining areas
- ensure that you know how to direct guests towards local medical treatment as needed

## SUMMARY OF STAFF TRAINING AND PROTECTIVE MEASURES FOR PANDEMIC FLU

### **What are staff training and protective measures for pandemic flu?**

1. Staff should be aware of the symptoms of pandemic flu and the measures to protect themselves from acquiring the illness
2. Staff should be informed of their duty to report any illness to their manager and to report any illness in guests
3. Staff should be instructed in specific cleaning procedures and the desirability of room isolation of infected guests (although this cannot be enforced)

4. Staff should be informed that there are legal duties that require both themselves and the management to comply with pandemic influenza protection measures
5. Staff involved with cleaning the room of a symptomatic guest will require PPE. This should be put on **before** entering the room. Staff must be informed about the importance of removing all used PPE and placing it in appropriate bags together with disposable cloths, paper towels etc and ensuring that the bag is tied securely before they leave the room being cleaned
6. Staff must be instructed in the importance of frequent hand washing if they are involved in cleaning or in personal care of persons with pandemic flu. Staff must be aware of the correct laundry procedures.

## ACCESS TO MEDICATION AND MEDICAL CARE IF THE GUEST IS DETERIORATING

If guests are very ill, they may need medical assessment by a GP. Hospitality industry staff may need to contact a GP surgery on their behalf. The UK has established a stockpile of antiviral medication for the treatment of flu. Most antiviral medication will be accessed through the National Flu Line service.

## OTHER OPERATIONAL ISSUES:

### **Cutlery and crockery**

There is no need to use disposable plates and cutlery. The combination of hot water and detergent used in dishwashers is sufficient to clean dishes and eating utensils used by ill guests. It is not necessary to separate eating utensils used by ill guests from those used by other guests or the staff.

## **Laundry procedures**

Laundry should be washed according to standard procedures. It is not necessary to separate linen and laundry used by ill guests from other hotel laundry. Care should be used when handling used laundry (ie avoid 'hugging' the laundry). Hand hygiene should be performed after handling any soiled laundry.

## **Disposal of used tissues**

Tissues used by ill guests should be placed in a plastic bag, sealed then disposed of with other waste. Consider placing bags in all waste bins in rooms for this purpose (remember to practice hand hygiene after you have sealed the bag and again should you subsequently dispose of this waste in your refuse uplift area outside the premises).

## **Cleaning procedures**

Environmental surfaces in the premises should be cleaned frequently with warm water and detergent or commonly available household cleaning products.

## **Guidance for guests**

Everyone can play their part in helping to reduce the spread of pandemic flu. Guests can reduce, but not eliminate, the risk of catching or spreading flu by:

- Frequent hand-washing with soap and water or using an alcohol handrub (if available) for hands that are not visibly soiled
- Only touching the mouth, eyes and/or nose, if hands have been recently cleaned
- Using a tissue when coughing or sneezing and then disposing of the tissue promptly and carefully
- Informing a member of staff of any illness and remaining in their room where their meals, drinks and anything else they need can be brought to them

- Avoiding the lounge, dining room, and other public areas while unwell
- Seeking assistance from staff if medical advice or care is needed
- Remaining in the hospitality facility when ill unless it is absolutely necessary and informing staff before leaving
- If leaving the facility for any reasons (eg to go for medical care), ensure that tissues are used when coughing and sneezing and that they are appropriately disposed of and hand hygiene is carried out afterwards

## BEING PREPARED

### **Knowing what to do**

If a flu pandemic starts, it will eventually affect the UK. Currently all services and organisations are developing contingency plans in order to try to maintain essential services in the event that large numbers of people become ill.

You can be prepared by knowing what to do and by becoming familiar with your own organisation's contingency and pandemic plans

- Remember the signs and symptoms of flu
- If you are ill whilst at home, do not go into work. Telephone your place of work
- If you become ill whilst at work, do not carry on working. Inform your manager/supervisor immediately
- Follow your company's hygiene protocol at all times
- Above all else all staff and guests must observe strict hand and respiratory hygiene
- Most guests with flu during a pandemic will be able to remain in the hotel and can be cared for by staff in the hospitality industry with support from the local NHS

## **Further Information**

Infection control training materials aimed primarily at the healthcare sector can be accessed at: [www.dh.gov.uk/en/PandemicFlu/DH\\_078752](http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/PandemicFlu/DH_078752). This includes posters on the correct use of personal protective equipment (PPE) and effective hand hygiene.

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