

12th May 2009

To all third sector organisations,

Planning for a pandemic

Please find attached supplementary information for third sector organisations to facilitate planning for a potential pandemic.

The aim of this information is to bring together the UK's planning assumptions and the Government's response strategy for the various aspects of an influenza pandemic that will be particularly relevant to the third sector. This will enable those at various levels in all third sector organisations to consider the direct impacts that a pandemic will have on their organisations and ways in which they can protect themselves and others, whilst helping to facilitate the wider response to minimise its impacts on the most vulnerable groups of society.

This document has always been planned for publication but, given the current situation, is now more relevant than ever.

Current Situation

As you will be aware, cases of Swine Flu have been confirmed in various countries and a number of people in the UK are now known to have contracted the virus. The World Health Organization (WHO) have increased the pandemic influenza alert to level 5, highlighting that the current threat from Swine Flu has the potential to emerge into a pandemic. Professor Sir Liam Donaldson, the UK's Chief Medical Officer has said:

“Phase five indicates that WHO considers a global pandemic to be imminent, whereas at phase four a global pandemic is not inevitable. A change to phase five is a signal to countries' governments to ramp up their pandemic preparations – which we are already doing. We have been planning for a situation like this for some years. The preparations we have in place and are continuing to make will help to ensure we respond well in the event of a pandemic.”

However, it still remains uncertain how severe the pandemic would be – were it to emerge – or the groups within society who would be most at risk. It is therefore important that we put in place robust, flexible preparations wherever possible.

Role of the Third Sector

Throughout a pandemic, third sector organisations may receive additional requests for help, particularly from health and social care partners, who need to be freed up to provide critical care. You may wish to consider how your services or activities may be utilised, enhanced or expanded to help and what support volunteers and staff may need to take on new, enhanced or expanded roles.

Your ability to provide this help will depend on your current capabilities, your knowledge of the likely needs of your current service user groups and the effect a pandemic may have in reducing your own capacity and resources. Addressing this now will help you consider the potential impact of your decisions and choices on your partner organisations and the statutory services.

More information

In order to help you access the most appropriate information for you and your organisation as easily as possible, a protocol has been agreed that makes:

- Directgov (www.direct.gov.uk/swineflu) the primary government website for essential cross-government swine flu messages
- NHS Choices (www.nhs.uk) the primary public-facing health information and advice service
- the Department of Health website (www.dh.gov.uk) the home of content relating to health and care professionals
- Business Link (www.businesslink.gov.uk/swineflu) the home of business-related information.

A swine flu information line has also been set up and is available on 0800 1 513 513 (or 0800 0 514 142 in Northern Ireland).

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lindsey Davies". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small flourish at the end.

PROFESSOR LINDSEY DAVIES FFPH FRCP

National Director of Pandemic Influenza preparedness.