



NPIA
National Policing
Improvement Agency

PANDEMIC FLU GUIDANCE FOR THE POLICE SERVICE

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



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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 booklet explains how members of the Police Service, in the course of their daily work, can protect themselves, their colleagues and their families, and 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 do if you have symptoms or are ill?

If you feel ill whilst at work, report it immediately to your senior officer or occupational health department. 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 station 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 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 personal protective equipment (PPE) and that you are using them correctly.
- Use the PPE (usually aprons, surgical masks and gloves) as directed by your senior officer, 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

During a pandemic, most people you will meet in the course of your work will not have flu. However, there may be situations where a member of public or someone in custody has a flu-like illness or you may be involved in arresting someone or administering first aid to or resuscitating someone who has flu-like symptoms. In these situations, you should follow standard guidance as issued by the service.

If a person has died at home and flu is suspected, then disposable gloves should be worn when handling the body or articles in the home. Avoid touching your face or mouth with your gloved hands. It is important that you wash your hands after leaving the premises. If there are symptomatic relatives or friends at the house, you should wear a surgical mask.

Use of PPE (apron, surgical mask and gloves) when dealing with people in custody

If someone in custody develops flu-like symptoms, they (the prisoner) should wear a surgical mask and be medically assessed. In addition, if you enter their cell or are within one metre of the prisoner then you should wear an apron, surgical mask and gloves (PPE).

After leaving the cell, the PPE you have worn should be disposed of and you should clean your hands. There may be environmental contamination in the cell.

Hard surfaces in the cell should be cleaned using normal cleaning products after a prisoner with flu-like illness has vacated the cell. If there is more than one prisoner with flu-like symptoms in custody, PPE should be changed after contact with each prisoner and hands cleaned. If a prisoner is symptom free then PPE does not need to be worn.

Use of PPE when dealing with the population at large

PPE is **NOT** needed for routine policing activities. You should only use PPE if you have to come into close contact (within one metre) with someone who has flu-like symptoms. Otherwise common sense actions to reduce contact should be used.

Disposing of PPE

In order to minimise the risk of infecting yourself or your colleagues from used PPE, it is essential that it is removed in a standard manner. You should first of all remove your gloves by turning them inside out in one single motion, then remove your apron and finally remove the surgical mask from your face using the ties or tapes. Avoid touching the front of the mask. The PPE should be bagged and disposed of. After disposing of PPE, it is essential that you clean your hands with soap and water or if not available, use an alcohol handrub.

Type of mask to be used by police officers

The surgical masks that you may have to wear will be the same as those used by healthcare workers. These are fluid repellent surgical masks and for most circumstances will provide an appropriate level of protection. However, if you are involved in assisting with a procedure

where an aerosol might be generated, such as assisting an ambulance worker in putting a tube into someone's lungs then, an FFP3¹ respirator should be used. Training and fit testing is required for these to be used properly.

Actions when mouth-mouth resuscitation is needed

If you need to give mouth-to-mouth resuscitation to someone then you should use a one-way resuscitation device e.g. Laerdal mask with filter.

¹ FFP3 respirators are multi layered masks, often with a valve at the front. They provide a high level of protection but are only used when the risk of infection is significant (such as intubating an individual who has flu-like illness).

The Police Service may work differently during the pandemic.

During a flu pandemic, the police service may work in a different way to how it works now:

- As the pandemic escalates, it will probably be necessary to cancel all non-urgent/routine activities and it is likely that only essential work will continue. This will be done to reduce the risk of exposure to people with flu-like illness in the population and ensure that sufficient staff are available to deal with emergencies.
- Work patterns may be rostered to try and minimise contact between officers and shift patterns may be changed if large numbers of officers are affected by flu at the same time.
- There may be changes to the way in which deaths in the community are dealt with.

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 will be required to work differently in order to manage acute staff shortages and to prevent the spread of infection.

You can be prepared by knowing what to do and by becoming familiar with your own service'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 station or occupational health department.
- If you become ill whilst on duty, do not carry on working. Inform your senior officer immediately.
- Above all else, you must observe strict hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette.

Further Information

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

This document has been produced in collaboration with the Association of Chief Police Officers Joint Advisory Group, the Department of Health and the Health Protection Agency.