

**Police Federation
Of England and Wales**



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PI/ccl

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To: The Chairman and Secretary, All Branch Boards

Dear Colleagues

GUIDANCE IN RELATION TO A PANDEMIC OUTBREAK

Although the situation is still unfolding and it is unclear whether the current outbreak in Mexico will develop into a global pandemic, or what form any such pandemic would take, the guidance which we produced in 2007 (JBB Circular 9/2007) is still relevant.

Once the situation becomes clearer the guidance will be updated. In addition, the HPA and HSE will both be producing advice should the situation develop and separate advice for health workers will be issued by the Department of Health.

1 What is Pandemic Influenza and what makes it different from ordinary flu?

Pandemic influenza is different from 'ordinary' seasonal flu, which for most people is an unpleasant illness but runs its natural course and is not life-endangering. Pandemic flu can occur when a new influenza virus emerges which is markedly different from recently circulating strains and to which humans have little or no immunity. Because of this lack of immunity the virus is able to infect more people over a large geographical area, spread rapidly and efficiently from person to person, and cause clinical illness in a proportion of those infected.

2 How is the disease spread?

It is easily passed from person to person when an infected person talks, coughs or sneezes. It can also spread through hand/face contact after touching anything that may become contaminated with the virus. Illness develops a few days (average 2-3) after being infected. Everyone is susceptible, although only about a quarter of the population are expected to become ill.

3 What are the symptoms?

The symptoms are similar to 'ordinary' flu but may be more severe: characteristically sudden onset of fever, headache, severe weakness and fatigue, aching muscles joints and respiratory symptoms such as cough, sore throat, and runny nose. Complications include bronchitis and pneumonia; deaths can occur.

4 Is this covered by health and safety legislation?

Yes - there are clear health and safety requirements in the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations (COSHH) to protect employees who may be exposed to infectious micro-organisms such as the influenza virus in the course of their work e.g. police officers coming into contact with infected people. Individuals are at risk from pandemic influenza if they are in close contact with someone who has the disease or with objects that have been contaminated by infectious material e.g. droplets from coughs and sneezes on surfaces, used tissues/clothing etc. Where such direct contact is foreseeable, employers should carry out a risk assessment and put preventive measures and/or controls in place as appropriate.

5 How can I protect myself at work?

In the workplace, practise good personal hygiene measures – use a disposable tissue to control coughs/sneezes, dispose of it appropriately and wash your hands before eating, drinking etc.

Use the personal protective equipment (PPE) as identified by your force's risk assessment when there is a risk of contamination with respiratory secretions. Do you have adequate supplies of PPE? You may want to consult your senior officer regarding appropriate control measures, for example gloves, face masks, eye protection and attendance management. Ensure that you are aware of your infection control procedures and that you are following them correctly.

Is your force liaising with its boundary forces on precautionary measures as bird flu does not respect force boundary lines.

6 Will I be able to get vaccinated against the virus?

Once a pandemic virus has been identified, even with the preparatory work under way, it will probably take around four to six months to produce a vaccine, possibly longer. Vaccines are unlikely to be available during the early stages of a pandemic and even then will not offer 100% protection. When a vaccine is available, the Government's aim will be to immunise the whole population as quickly as possible as vaccine supplies increase.

You may want to consider your force policy on provision of flu vaccines, as this will assist with an early intervention to stop the mutation of the virus across species. Vaccines will be given to some high priority groups of people before others. Groups provisionally prioritised for vaccination include health care workers most at risk and 'essential services workers' to prevent disruption to key services through absence due to illness (consider attendance management policy).

7 What if I catch flu?

If you do catch flu:

- Stay at home and rest
- Take medicines such as aspirin, ibuprofen or paracetamol to relieve the symptoms (following the instructions with the medicines)
- Drink plenty of fluids.

Acknowledgement

In the preparation of this Circular, we are grateful for the information and guidance provided by the Health and Safety Executive on their website:

www.hse.gov.uk/biosafety/diseases/pandflu.htm

The Department of Health:

www.dh.gov.uk/en/PublicHealth/Flu/PandemicFlu/DH_065006

And the Health Protection Agency in their guidance for the police: www.hpa.org.uk/

Further information is also available from the World Health Organisation website:

www.who.int/csr/swine_flu/swine_flu_faq.pdf

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ian Rennie". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'I'.

IAN RENNIE
General Secretary