

Gateway reference : 12230

TO:

All Chief Executives in NHS Trusts in England,
All Chief Executives in Primary Care Trusts in England,
All Chief Executives in NHS Foundation Trusts in England,
All Chief Executives in Strategic Health Authorities in England

CC:

All Chairs in NHS Trusts in England,
All Chairs in Primary Care Trusts in England,
All Chairs in NHS Foundation Trusts in England,
All Chairs in Strategic Health Authorities in England
All Flu Lead Directors in Strategic Health Authorities in England
All Chief Executives in Local Authorities in England
Monitor
Care Quality Commission

16 July 2009

Dear Colleague,

A (H1N1) Swine Influenza: Standing up the National Pandemic Flu Service

I wrote to you on 2 July to explain our decision to move to a treatment phase in the management of the current swine flu pandemic.

In recognition of the increasing levels of flu consultations with GPs and the need to be able to give antivirals to increasing numbers of people quickly, Secretary of State for Health Andy Burnham has today agreed to stand up the National Pandemic Flu Service (NPFS). This will be with effect from the end of next week in England. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland do not yet need to use the National Pandemic Flu Service. This situation is being kept under constant review and they will be able to opt into the Service as and when needed.

It is anticipated that this will relieve some of the current pressures on the system – particularly in primary care and A&E and ensure that GPs can focus their efforts on treating patients with more serious symptoms, with all other patients being treated well and promptly by the NPFS.

From the end of next week, people in England will access swine flu advice and treatment through this Service, rather than by visiting their GP. People diagnosed with swine flu will be given an authorisation code that a 'flu friend' – a friend or relative who does not have swine flu – can use to pick up antivirals from a local Antiviral Collection Point (ACP). It remains the case that those people identified as being at greater risk of serious complications should keep in touch with their GP. Until the end of next week the existing arrangements for obtaining advice and

information remain in place.

Every PCT must revisit their existing ACP network plan to ensure that it matches the current and projected spread of the disease locally to support the launch of the NPFS at the end of next week. PCTs must also ensure that they are maintaining regular communication with GPs to help maintain public confidence in the response to the pandemic and ensure consistency between the national messages and those messages delivered by GPs.

You will shortly begin to see nationally placed advertising to promote the NPFS and this material will be made available for local use by NHS communications leads to help ensure this consistency of message. We will update you again with details of how to access the NPFS before the end of next week.

Revised planning assumptions have also been published today. These assumptions are revised, reasonable worst case scenarios for planning purposes based on what we have learned from the virus so far. They are **not** predictions of how we expect the virus to behave. They support effective planning for every eventuality which the public would expect us to be doing at this time. I expect that every organisation will now review their own plan in light of these new assumptions. You can find the planning assumptions on the Department's website at http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_102892. Under separate cover, a revised modelling tool has been sent to all SHA Flu Lead Directors to support region-wide planning.

I want to also remind you that today, the Health Protection Agency published their second weekly data briefing summarising the numbers of swine flu cases, hospitalisations and deaths. This information can be found each week on their website - www.hpa.org.uk.

Your SHA Flu Lead Director should be able to answer any queries that you might have as a result of this letter. Their contact details can be found at Annex A.

I want to thank you again for the continued work of you and your teams to respond to the current situation. I do understand the pressure you have been dealing with and hope that these developments go some way to relieving some of this.

Yours sincerely,



Ian Dalton
National Director of NHS Flu Resilience
Department of Health

SHA Flu Lead Directors

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