

Pandemic Influenza - Overview

Context (top risks, why it's important)

1. Pandemic influenza is the top risk in the UK Government's National Risk Assessment based on its high likelihood and potential catastrophic impact. Such a pandemic would take the form of a worldwide outbreak of influenza caused by a novel flu virus emerging with sustained human to human transmission. The reasonable worst case scenario outlined in the current National Risk Assessment indicates that, in a period of a number of months, up to 50% of the population may experience symptoms which could lead to in excess of 750,000 fatalities in total in the UK (in addition to the 500,000 deaths per year normally). Furthermore, staff absence would be significant and could be in excess of 20% for 2-3 weeks at the height of the pandemic. As such, a severe pandemic would affect all of the UK and require a whole-of-government response.

Background

2. The UK already has extensive plans in place to respond to an influenza pandemic. A UK-wide strategic approach to planning for and responding to the demands of such a pandemic was published in the UK Influenza Pandemic Preparedness Strategy 2011.
3. In February 2017, following a national exercise, the Prime Minister chaired a NSC (THRC) meeting which considered the current state of pandemic influenza preparedness across Government. It was agreed that planning should be revitalised with a cross-Government programme of work led by DHSC and the Civil Contingencies Secretariat (CCS) in Cabinet Office.
4. While Cabinet Office is supporting this work, the Department of Health continue to be the Lead Government Department for infectious diseases including pandemic influenza.
5. The outcomes of the first year's work programme was reported back to NSC(THRC) via write-round in April 2018.
6. The second year's work programme was due to report back and complete its work in March 2019. However, the Government decided to step up contingency planning for no deal planning (Operation Yellowhammer) in December 2018, which the Civil Contingencies Secretariat was leading on.

Irrelevant

7. Following a submission to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, it was agreed that the programme would focus on two work streams, the Pandemic Flu Bill and the Excess Deaths Framework, in order to allow departments to devote sufficient resource to No Deal preparedness.

Current Activity

8. In November 2019, the Pandemic Flu Readiness Board (PFRB) met for the first time in a year to discuss how to reprioritize work streams as a number of work streams have been on hold. In summary, there are 5 work streams from year 1 and 3 work streams from Year 2.

9. How best to update on work streams, what they cover, status?:

- a) Healthcare:
- b) Community Care:
- c) Excess Deaths:
- d) Sector Resilience:
- e) Cross-cutting Enablers/Coordination:

10. There are also three Year Two Work Streams:

- a) 2011 Pandemic Flu Strategy Refresh: On hold
- b) Pan Flu Document Restructure: On hold
- c) LRF Pandemic Flu Resilience Standard: Due to be published at the end of the year.

Next Steps

Following the PFRB meeting in November 2019, the general consensus of the board was to hold a cross Government exercise in early 2020.

To create and run the exercise by this time frame,

Irrelevant