

Our ref. CDL/1614

Members of the National Security Council
(Threats, Hazards, Resilience and Contingencies) sub-Committee

6 April 2018

Dear colleagues,

Pandemic Influenza Preparedness

Pandemic influenza is the top risk on the National Risk Assessment. Following a major exercise in late 2016 and a subsequent Prime Minister chaired National Security Council (Threats, Hazards, Resilience and Contingencies) meeting in February 2017, a cross-Government programme was initiated to further enhance pandemic influenza preparedness. Sustained collective activity over the last 12 months has enhanced preparedness but there is more to do. Given the likelihood and impact of this risk, this letter reaffirms the need for continued, concerted activity across Government, in collaboration with the Devolved Administrations.

When a pandemic occurs, there will be little or no immunity to the virus in the population, unlike seasonal influenza. The last influenza pandemic (Swine Flu) in 2009 was relatively mild. Health specialists believe that it is a case of when, not if, the next pandemic will occur. It is impossible to predict with any certainty the severity of the next new virus strain or when it might appear, but planning is based on a reasonable worst case scenario of:

- up to 50% the population potentially contracting pandemic influenza;
- up to 4% of symptomatic patients potentially requiring hospital care;
- around 800,000 additional fatalities in the UK; and
- significant workforce absence levels, in excess of 20% for two to three weeks at the height of the pandemic.

Within the last 12 months substantial work has been undertaken, supported by engagement with the local responder community, to strengthen the alignment of plans and activities. This has delivered:

- improved plans of the health sector to flex systems and resources to expand beyond normal capacity levels;
- clear plans to prioritise and augment adult social care and community health care during a pandemic response;

- refreshed, and soon to be reissued, guidance for local responders on planning for large numbers of additional deaths, underpinned by a comprehensive analysis of capability across the country;
- updated planning assumptions for workforce absence and stress-tested plans from Lead Government Departments which have responsibility for particular sectors, covering both the peak and duration of workforce absence;
- confirmed UK Government policy content for a draft Pandemic Influenza Bill, to be held internally and taken through Parliament if required, to support the response to a severe pandemic. We have also worked closely with colleagues in the Devolved Administrations to seek to develop a one-UK approach;
- a comprehensive four nations pandemic influenza health-focused communications strategy; and
- options to ensure Government thinking is supported by moral and ethical advice.

Next Steps

Consideration of this risk holistically and collaboratively across Government and with the Devolved Administrations is vital. A lot has been achieved, but there is more to do to both maintain and enhance preparedness to an acceptable level. In the next 12 months, the intention is to:

- finalise national arrangements; and
- prepare products to support the continued enhancement of local arrangements including:
 - refreshing the four nation UK Influenza Pandemic Preparedness Strategy; and
 - developing a pandemic influenza Resilience Standard, against which local capabilities and readiness can be assessed.

It is vital that this work continues to be prioritised and resourced by Departments, given the significance and scale of the risk. This cross-Government work will continue to be overseen by the Pandemic Influenza Readiness Board, chaired jointly by the Cabinet Office and Department for Health and Social Care, on which your departments and the Devolved Administrations sit. Key actions for departments are summarised in the attached table. A further update on progress will be provided in early 2019.

Yours ever,

Personal Data

Rt Hon David Lidington CBE MP

Personal Data

Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP

Pandemic Influenza Preparedness Next Steps – Key Actions for Departments

Workstream	Output	Lead Department	Supporting Department(s)
Finalisation of national arrangements			
1 - Healthcare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Service-facing surge and triage guidance to enable appropriate frontline decisions about patient care during a pandemic. 	Department of Health and Social Care	NHS England Public Health England Devolved Administrations
2 - Community Care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Service-facing guidance for delivering adult social care and community care during a pandemic. 	Department of Health and Social Care	NHS England Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government Civil Contingencies Secretariat, Cabinet Office Care Quality Commission Devolved Administrations
3 - Sector Resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focused actions arising to further assure the resilience of key sectors. Refreshing the Pandemic Influenza Business Checklist. 	Civil Contingencies Secretariat, Cabinet Office	Department for Education Home Office Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service / Ministry of Justice Department of Health and Social Care Public Health England Health and Safety Executive Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government Ministry of Defence Foreign Office Cabinet Office Government Office for Science Devolved Administrations Department for Work and Pensions Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy <i>All departments are responsible for maintaining and further enhancing the resilience of their sectors to workforce absence as a result of pandemic influenza. For critical national infrastructure this will be supported by the annual Sector Security and Resilience Plans.</i>
4 - Planning for a significant increase in mortality during a pandemic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guidance on specific aspects of the death management process. Development of options for additional measures 	Civil Contingencies Secretariat, Cabinet Office (coordinating in the absence of a lead department)	Ministry of Justice Home Office Ministry of Defence Department of Health and Social Care Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government Health and Safety Executive

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	by which central government could provide additional support to local responders.		Human Tissue Authority Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Devolved Administrations
5a - UK wide draft internally-held Pandemic Influenza Bill	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prepare / finalise draft clauses covering the UK Government and Devolved Administration content. Prepare supporting Bill documentation. Develop a review mechanism to keep the content up to date. 	Department of Health and Social Care	Civil Contingencies Secretariat, Cabinet Office Department for Education HM Treasury Ministry of Justice Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service General Register Office Home Office Devolved Administrations
5b - Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approved four nations health communications strategy. Coherent and planned cross-Government communications messages during a pandemic. 	Department of Health and Social Care Communications	Devolved Administrations Public Health England Cabinet Office Communications All Other Government Departments
5c - Moral and Ethical Considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement arrangements to provide moral and ethical advice during a pandemic. 	Civil Contingencies Secretariat, Cabinet Office and Department of Health and Social Care	Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government Public Health England NHS England Government Office for Science Devolved Administrations
Products to support the continued enhancement of local arrangements			
	Refreshing the 2011 UK Influenza Pandemic Preparedness Strategy.	Department of Health and Social Care	All Other Government Departments Devolved Administrations
	Developing a Pandemic Influenza Resilience Standard for local responders (in England).	Civil Contingencies Secretariat, Cabinet Office and Department of Health and Social Care	Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government Public Health England NHS England Devolved Administrations

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	Reconfiguring public and local responder facing information / guidance on pandemic influenza on gov.uk and Resilience Direct.	Department of Health and Social Care	Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government NHS England Public Health England Health and Safety Executive Civil Contingencies Secretariat, Cabinet Office <i>Some input may be required from other Departments that own current public facing pandemic influenza guidance.</i>
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