

OFFICIAL - SENSITIVE

Influenza-type disease (pandemic)

Reasonable Worst Case Scenario – for planning purposes only

The note below outlines the impacts that Scotland might face due to an pandemic influenza or similar such type pandemic. There is not, at this stage, a specific Coronavirus COVID-19 Reasonable Worst Case Scenario (RWCS). Health and Scientific experts continue to work on this as more data becomes available. However it is deemed prudent to use the existing Pan Flu RWCS for initial planning purposes.

Underneath each of the key risk areas, we have identified what initial activity is being undertaken across the SG and with stakeholders following the activation of the Health Response Hub and SGoRR in the past few weeks.

This note summarises the main areas of risk in relation to an outbreak of Pandemic Influenza, as identified and ranked by the Scottish Risk Assessment 2018.

Summary of general risk

All ages may be affected, but until more details of the virus emerge we cannot know which groups will be most at risk.

- Up to 50% of the population could experience symptoms of pandemic influenza (approximately 2.7million people in Scotland) – (NOTE: Actual cases will be higher but many people will be asymptomatic).
- Up to 4% of symptomatic patients (approximately 110,000 people) could require hospital care if the virus results in severe illness, 25% of whom require level 3 critical care (approximately 27,000 people).
- Up to 2.5% of those with symptoms could die as a result of the pandemic (approximately 68,000 people).
- Peak illness rates of around 10-12% (measured in new clinical cases per week as a proportion of the population) in each of the weeks in the peak fortnight.
- Workforce absence rates for illness reaching 17-20% in the peak weeks (though SMEs may expect to experience higher %age impacts). 50% of the workforce may require time off at some stage for illness and/or caring needs.

Impacts

The primary consequences associated with a Pandemic Flu are outlined below. Each is assessed on an “impact” basis, based upon available data, analysis and historical evidence from Scotland and other relevant countries.

1. Health Care

In a moderate or more severe influenza pandemic all health and social care services will be stretched and will need to reduce or cease non-urgent activity in order to make the maximum capacity available to meet the health care needs of those who are severely ill as a result of the influenza virus.

ACTION: Considerable levels of work across the Scottish NHS and Social Care Sector to assess existing plans; plan for management of testing and confirmed cases; and to consider the considerable challenges posed by significant increases on demand across primary care, hospital admissions and critical care.

2. Economic impact

A measure of the total net economic cost derived as a result of each incident occurring, including costs incurred up to five years post-incident. Previous analysis from the early 2010s suggested a pandemic was estimated to cost at least 1.8% of a year's GDP in addition to the cost of absent workers.

ACTION: Chief Economist's office undertaking detailed economic impact modelling work based on pan flu RWCS; SG leads encouraged to liaise with key sectors over their Business Continuity Planning.

ACTION: Given possibility of impact on tourism and major events, officials are liaising with sector leads and keeping SGoRR advised – no major impacts to date.

3. Fatalities

The number of people killed by the incident, directly or within the first year thereafter, including those that die as a result of cancellation or delay to medical treatment, will exceed the total number of deaths in an average year, and put pressure on the funeral industry and death registration process.

ACTION: Plans are in place for dealing with 'excess deaths' and are being updated.

4. Transport

Some impact expected if significant staff absence rates are experienced. Potential for disruption to international travel network.

ACTION: Transport Scotland in contact with DfT and transport providers about Business Continuity Planning and other impacts.

5. Education

The impact of any prolonged closures would have substantial economic and social consequences, and have a disproportionately large effect on health and social care because of the demographic profile of those employed in these sectors.

ACTION: Schools officials are liaising with Directors of Education on current specific health protection advice, and reviewing existing plans around the need (or not) to consider targeted or widespread school closures.

ACTION: FE/HE officials in contact with the sector about the provision of current health advice.

6. General Public Services (Local Government, Communities, Essential Services and Critical National Infrastructure)

All these sectors will be impacted by the reduction in staff availability, but all should have in place robust Business Continuity Plans to ensure that essential service remain functional during peak impacts.

ACTION: SG leads are in contact with the stakeholders over their general BCP planning.

7. Criminal Justice

Expect large scale disruption to the courts and justice system due to reduced courts staffing levels (judiciary, Fiscals, clerks etc) and illness impacts on prison system.

8. Psychological (inc public disorder)

This impact combines both ““Outrage” and “Perception”. Public outrage aims to capture the sense of anger and indignation that erupts after an incident has occurred. Public perception of a risk assesses the sense of on-going personal vulnerability and fear resulting from direct or indirect exposure to an incident and subsequent likely behavioural changes. Possible major public disorder related to availability of medicines or food stockpiling.

ACTION: SG Comms part of UK-wide comms group which is being advised by Behavioural Science experts in terms of proposed messaging at key stages of a pan flu-type outbreak.

9. External Affairs / International (not drawn from Risk Assessment)

Significant numbers of UK nationals overseas, many of whom may seek to return. This could place a strain on services such as housing, welfare and the health service.

ACTION: UKG looking to bring together key partners, including DAs, to consider practical implications of a ‘surge’ in returnees.

ACTION: FCO with DfID have set up an international ‘taskforce’ and have invited SG International team to be involved as appropriate.

ACTION: All UK Visa Offices in China are currently closed. International colleagues are seeking to ascertain what the impact of this might be on Scotland (University applicants for example).

Areas not expected to experience significant impacts are electricity supply; environment; food supplies (unless stockpiling occurs); communications; and water supplies.

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