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Viewpoint

Professor Lindsey Davies, National Director of Pandemic Influenza Preparedness, introduces the latest news and highlights current developments.

Welcome to the latest issue of **Pandemic Flu News**. It's been a very busy and positive month, with the highlight of course being the **NHS National Workshop on Pandemic Flu held in London**.

I thought the workshop was a resounding success [page 2]. It was encouraging to see so many people attend and to hear the considerable progress being made. It was also very helpful for the national preparedness team to be able to gather important feedback, which we will use to inform future initiatives and decision-making.

Many people at the workshop asked me about the latest developments with Flu Line: when exactly it would be up and running and what our expectations were for it. The latest news is that we are in the process of appointing a

supplier for the service and will be in a position to give a detailed update on developments in next month's issue.

The Confirm and Challenge process has also kept us busy over recent weeks. The national team has now had meetings with flu leads and senior managers at every SHA across the country, using the self-assessment forms submitted by PCTs and acute trusts earlier in the year as the basis for our discussions.

Information gleaned from these meetings was used to inform the content of the national workshop and for setting up the NHS team to support implementation. One of the challenges that came through was that people are really struggling to plan for the post pandemic recovery stage, so we are now looking at how we can help people build recovery into their area plans [page 6].

On guidance, I'm delighted to report that guidance on preparing mental health services in England for responding to pandemic flu has now been published [page 9]. Congratulations to all those who worked so hard to put it together.

Finally, there's something for all the family in this month's issue – a 'Dirty Bertie' children's story and nursery rhyme aimed at improving respiratory and hand hygiene practice, as part of the CATCH IT, BIN IT, KILL IT campaign [page 9]. Please spread the word by encouraging as many people as possible to teach the story and rhyme to their children.

If you have any comments or queries regarding any aspect of your planning process, please contact me at pandemicflu@dh.gsi.gov.uk

Professor Lindsey Davies



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At-a-glance

- move from planning to delivering preparedness
- progress and challenges outlined

More than 300 people attended the fourth NHS National Workshop on pandemic flu held on 23 June at Church House, Westminster.

In her welcoming remarks to delegates, National Director of Pandemic Influenza Preparedness, Professor Lindsey Davies, said that the workshop marked an important shift in focus, moving from planning for preparedness to delivering it. The task now was to translate the National Framework and supporting guidance into action so that staff knew what it meant for them.

She noted that there were many familiar faces experienced in working on pandemic flu in the audience and others who were new to the area – one of the great benefits of attending the workshop was the opportunity to learn from each other and provide mutual support.

Her presentation went on to review progress so far, look at next steps and address some of the challenges faced in taking the work forward.

Her update on progress included:

- completion of the NHS self-assessment process
- the NHS implementation team in place
- launch of the **CATCH IT, BIN IT, KILL IT** campaign
- completion of public engagement research
- the work of other Government

departments, especially with food retailers and the energy industry

- the Local Resilience Forum (LRF) conference for multi-agency planning.

Some of the key next steps included:

- publication of HR, surge management and maternity services guidance
- development of the national communication strategy
- social care regional roadshows
- development of the national Flu Line service
- sharing learning through the Pan Flu Forum
- encouraging exercises to test plans locally
- refining the assessment tool to enable sign off of NHS preparedness in January 2009.



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National NHS Workshop on Pandemic Flu

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Professor Davies acknowledged the challenge that planners and flu leads had faced in getting sign up from their executive and local teams amidst competing priorities. She thanked everyone for their continued good work and reinforced that the focus now was to make the plans real to the people on the ground.

She urged delegates to engage with the Department of Health team, particularly the NHS implementation team so 'we can continue to help you in providing the support that you need'.

Q&A session: your questions answered

Professor Davies, together with workshop leads and other members of the team, answered questions from delegates.

Q: What work is taking place in the devolved administrations and how does it dovetail with that in England?

A: The devolved administrations are involved in all our work. An example of this close working is that the surge management guidance is being led by Scotland.

Q: Regarding the surge guidance, will there be guidance and a definition of essential services at primary care, sectoral, borough, regional and national level? And will it include guidance on admission and discharge criteria?

A: Yes and yes. The new surge guidance has changed from the interim guidance published in

November 2007. It is due out for consultation by August and NHS organisations are encouraged to use it to inform the development of plans.

Q: Could CATCH IT, BIN IT, KILL IT benefit from a TV campaign?

A: We have developed a TV advert and it will be marketed in the autumn.

Q: What are the plans addressing access to antivirals in closed institutions?

A: As part of the antiviral distribution strategy, guidance on local arrangements and collection points will address closed institutions. This is due out at the end of July.



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Q&A session: your questions answered (continued)

Q: Have you considered the possible fraudulent use of Flu Line?

A: Operation of Flu Line has several security steps built into the process to access antivirals. We are taking advice from antifraud specialist sources. In addition, our communications strategy will help address this by stigmatising non-compliant behaviour.

Q: The launch of Flu Line seems very late bearing in mind that PCTs need to have plans in place and exercises done in the autumn?

A: We are using today to update you on progress and it is a very important piece of work to get right. In addition, there has always been a need for local back up plans as a contingency in case a pandemic were to happen now.

Q: Will there be access to antivirals via GPs for patients who require consultations?

A: Yes. Local arrangements for distribution and collection points will recognise it is essential for GPs to get rapid access to antivirals if they see people developing symptoms.

Q: How is engagement with GPs being driven at the national level?

A: Both the Royal College of GPs (RCGP) and the British Medical Association's GP Committee (BMA GPC) have been closely involved in our work. New GP guidance is being led by the RCGP and an agreement has been announced recently by NHS Employers and BMA GPC to ensure GPs are not financially disadvantaged if routine work is suspended in the event of a pandemic.

Specialist breakout groups

Sessions held during the workshop covered:

- surge management
- HR and workforce
- social care
- antiviral collection points
- antiviral distribution including Flu Line
- communications
- pharmacy and medicines
- business continuity
- local resilience planning
- surveillance.

Links and Info

Presentations and notes from the breakout groups will be available on the website at www.dh.gov.uk/pandemicflu



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NHS Workshop: public engagement and communications

At-a-glance

- new communications strategy
- linked to insights on public response

An overview of the national communications strategy was presented to the NHS National Workshop on Pandemic Flu by Head of Communications, Fiona Carr.

Fiona shared the key findings from the public engagement programme and explained how they provided insights to help shape the communications strategy.

Insights included:

- little public understanding or awareness of pandemic flu and little desire among the majority of the public to engage with the issue until it becomes a certainty
- many people are unlikely to believe the Government is acting in their best interests in the early stages and consequently would turn to friends or trusted members of their community for advice
- many people are likely to act in their own self interest and believe this is morally justified
- a significant proportion of people are likely to panic – particularly women with children.

What this means for communications is a need to:

- start early
- gain endorsement from opinion formers
- explain the 'why?'
- use spokespeople and channels trusted by the public
- give people time to deal with a highly emotional issue
- build in flexibility as we cannot predict peoples' response or how the pandemic will develop.

The research suggests that each WHO Phase is associated with a different public 'mood' that has implications for how we position communications.

| | | | | |
|-------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| Public 'mood' | Vague worry | Alarm bells | Air raid siren | Panic stations |
| Phase | Phase 3 | Phase 4 | Phase 5 | Phase 6 |
| Role of communications | Stakeholder engagement | Awareness and education | Preparation | Protection |



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NHS Workshop: public engagement and communications

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This in turn leads to different information requirements at each stage and thus affects the role of communications, tone of voice and messages required.

A campaign of measured engagement is therefore required with the following stages:

| Phase 3 | Phase 4 | Phase 5 | Phase 6 |
|--|--|---|---|
| Building good respiratory and hand hygiene (RHH) | RHH and making the link with pandemic flu | Getting the nation ready | Managing the pandemic flu crisis |
| Building relationships with key stakeholders including media | Seeding of pandemic flu messages – what is it, why is it different? Public reassurance about preparedness | Continue pandemic flu education and advice with reference to the spread of the pandemic | Promote protection and self care Provide updates on the progress of the pandemic |

The detailed communications plan is now being developed and will be ready in the autumn.

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Supporting implementation

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At-a-glance

- Pan Flu Forum launched
- training modules available

Pan Flu Forum: find, access, share

The launch of a new online forum to share information and support collaboration was well received at the NHS National Workshop on Pandemic Flu, with more than 140 people signing up to join.

The Pan Flu Forum is designed to help members find relevant information, access core documents and share best practice.

To join the forum, contact your SHA Flu Lead to check you haven't already been signed up and then email pandemicflu@dh.gsi.gov.uk with your name, job title and organisation. You will then receive an email with information on how to use the forum.

Training modules now available

Two easy-to-use training modules designed to support learning about pandemic flu were also launched at the NHS Workshop.

Module 1 is the standard version aimed at staff with little or no knowledge of pandemic flu. Module 2 is the clinician's version for audiences with some prior knowledge.

The package is in PowerPoint format and simple to use. Each module takes about 30 minutes to complete and can be downloaded online through the Pan Flu Forum.

Mental health services: workshops

In response to feedback, the implementation team is planning a workshop to help mental health services in their planning.

This will address issues such as

how to follow the guidance and adhere to mental health legislation in the event of a pandemic.

The names of mental health flu leads for each area should be emailed to sharon.fox@dh.gsi.gov.uk so she can involve the relevant contacts.

Work on recovery

Analysis of self-assessment reports has highlighted a need to address the post pandemic recovery stage. The implementation team is now looking at how they can help you build the recovery element into local NHS plans.

This work will be carried out in close collaboration with the business continuity workstream, led by Phil Storr and Merlyn Demaine in the Department of Health emergency preparedness team, to ensure all our work is integrated.



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Social care supporting the health response

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At-a-glance

- key role for social care
- regional awareness raising events

A good mix of health, social care and provider representatives at the social care breakout groups at the NHS National Workshop demonstrated clear recognition of the key role social care has to play in the event of a pandemic.

The groups helped identify further issues to be addressed in the social care pack, such as assuring the sustainability of care homes. They also shared good practice. One local authority, for example, was considering a community-based ‘look after your neighbour’ scheme.

Feedback from the workshop and other events has indicated the need for more work to engage local authority social care

colleagues in the health response to a pandemic. Nine regional awareness raising events will be held in the autumn to help address this. The target audience will be social care managers with a responsibility or interest in pandemic flu preparedness, together with primary care and acute trust colleagues, and owners/managers of private and voluntary care services.

Work to support carers during a pandemic has received the backing of the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS) Carers Reference Group. This will help develop information that will be both influenced and endorsed by carers and those who support them.

Links and Info

To find out more about raising the profile of pandemic flu in social care email Simon Cole at simon.cole@dh.gsi.gov.uk

CORRECTION Osetamivir – dosage guidance for children

In April's Flu News there was an error in the item on page 2 entitled 'National Framework – update', which referred to oseltamivir now being available in capsules for children.

The correct revised dosage guidance (from June 2008) based on capsules is:

- aged one year and over but under three (body weight up to and including 15kg) – 1 x 30mg capsule every 12 hours for five days
- aged three years and over but under seven (body weight over 15kg and up to 23kg) – 1 x 45mg capsule every 12 hours for five days
- aged seven years and over (body weight 24kg and above) – adult dose 1 x 75mg capsule every 12 hours for five days.



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CATCH IT, BIN IT, KILL IT: Dirty Bertie cleans up his act

At-a-glance

- children's character used to raise respiratory and hand hygiene awareness
- new story and nursery rhyme

The popular children's character, Dirty Bertie, is now part of the **CATCH IT, BIN IT, KILL IT** campaign in a programme of activity developed to target mums and young children.

A survey run on a popular website for mums revealed that more than 75 percent of them are unknowingly teaching their children incorrect respiratory and hand hygiene procedures. The survey also showed that mums expect their children to develop colds and don't realise that if they followed the correct practice they could reduce the

risk of infection considerably.

To help get the message across, the pandemic flu communications team at the Department of Health has commissioned a children's story based on the popular character, Dirty Bertie, and a nursery rhyme, which are being made available through the nursery chain Gymboree.

Working with Gymboree, the team hosted 15 events across England where children were taught the nursery rhyme and read the Dirty Bertie story. Parents at the sessions also had time with a local nurse to hear more about good respiratory and hand hygiene practice.

The events achieved wide press and local radio coverage, including an item in the Times Education Supplement.



Links and Info

Access the Dirty Bertie leaflet and the nursery rhyme at www.dh.gov.uk/catchit



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A brief summary of the status of health guidance.

| Topic | Version | Status |
|---|-------------------|---|
| Mental health services | final | published in July – view guidance |
| Maternity services | draft for comment | in production – due mid July |
| Port health | final | complete and awaiting ministerial sign off |
| HR guidance for the NHS | final | complete and awaiting ministerial sign off |
| Surge management | draft for comment | complete and awaiting ministerial sign off |
| Management of death and cremation certification | revised draft | consultation on revised draft ended 30 June |

Other guidance of interest

Recently published guidance relevant to pandemic flu planning includes:

- **'Key Communities, Key Resources: Engaging the capacity and capabilities of faith communities in civil resilience'**
- **'Faith Communities and Pandemic Flu: Guidance for faith communities and local influenza pandemic committees'**.

Both were written for the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) by the Faith Communities' Consultative Council (FCCC).

The guidance recognises the role faith groups can have in planning for a flu pandemic with their networks of people, resources and channels of communication. They are an accepted provider of counselling and advice, particularly during a crisis where carer support and bereavement counselling might be required.

- **'Preparing for Pandemic Influenza: supplementary guidance for local resilience forum planners'**

Published in May by the Civil Contingencies Secretariat (CCS), Cabinet Office, this guidance should be read in conjunction with the CCS document **'Preparing for Pandemic Influenza: Guidance to local planners'**.



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Scientific advice on neuraminidase inhibitors

The Scientific Pandemic Influenza Advisory Committee (SPI) has now issued a statement providing scientific advice on stockpiling neuraminidase inhibitors.

Links and Info

This is available at: <http://www.advisorybodies.doh.gov.uk/spi/statements.htm>

Licensed H5N1 pre-pandemic vaccines

A European marketing authorisation for GSK's H5N1 adjuvanted pre-pandemic vaccine Prepandrix was granted in May. This is the first European marketing authorisation for a pre-pandemic vaccine. It is based on the H5N1 Vietnam strain.

The Department of Health (DH) has no specific plans at present to buy Prepandrix. However, the science underpinning the further

development and potential use of pre-pandemic vaccine is cutting edge and has just been reviewed by UK, and other international experts.

Links and Info

Access further information

A US marketing authorisation for a Sanofi H5N1 vaccine was granted in 2007 and a CSL H5N1 vaccine has just been licenced in Australia.

Links and Info

Access further information

Baxter vaccine trial results

Low doses of an H5N1 avian influenza vaccine made by Baxter BioScience generated immune responses against the vaccine strain of H5N1 in most volunteers. Cross-reactivity with two other H5N1 strains was also shown in many of them, suggesting that this

may be a useful H5N1 vaccine.

As the vaccine is based on a whole, 'wild-type' H5N1 virus it can be produced within 12 weeks from the time a pandemic flu virus is identified, compared with 22 weeks for traditional egg-based influenza vaccine development.

DH has previously signed advanced supply contracts for pandemic specific vaccine with Baxter. This means Baxter will supply a pandemic influenza vaccine to the UK as soon as production commences, once the pandemic strain is identified and made available by the World Health Organisation.

Ehrlich, Hartmut J. et al. A Clinical Trial of a Whole-Virus H5N1 Vaccine Derived from Cell Culture. *N Engl J Med.* 2008 Jun 12; 358(24):2573-2584.

Links and Info

View article

An interesting comparison of the above cell culture technique and traditional egg-



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based technique to produce pandemic influenza vaccine is available in:

Wright, Peter F. Vaccine Preparedness – Are We Ready for the Next Influenza Pandemic? *N Engl J Med.* 2008 Jun 12; 358(24):2540-2543.

Links and Info

[View article](#)

Pandemic potential of avian influenza H7 viruses

DEFRA confirmed that the avian influenza present in laying hens on a premises near Banbury in Oxfordshire is the highly pathogenic H7N7 strain.

At the same time, but unrelated to this outbreak, scientists published an article showing that human cases of avian H7 flu appear to have become more adapted to humans. These viruses have displayed an increased ability to bind to human host cells, which suggests that they may be improving

their capacity to infect humans. Several of the H7-variants tested were capable of transmitting between ferrets.

These findings emphasise that it is impossible to predict which influenza virus will cause the next pandemic. Belser, Jessica A. et al. Contemporary North American influenza H7 viruses possess human receptor specificity: Implications for virus transmissibility. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.* 2008 May 27; 105(21):7558-7563.

Links and Info

[View article](#)

Genetic compatibility and virulence of avian H5N1 and human H3N2 influenza A viruses

Dual infection with avian and human influenza viruses and subsequent reassortment is a possible mechanism by which a pandemic influenza virus may arise.

To understand the biological properties of H5N1 viruses that may emerge following reassortment with human influenza viruses, researchers have used reverse genetics to generate the 63 possible virus reassortants derived from H5N1 and H3N2 viruses, containing the H5N1 surface protein genes.

They found a surprisingly high number of viable gene combinations. Most of those tested on animals showed much lower virulence than seen with the parent H5N1 strain.

Chen, Li-Mei; Davis, C. Todd; Zhou, Hong; Cox, Nancy J., and Donis, Ruben O. Genetic Compatibility and Virulence of Reassortants Derived from Contemporary Avian H5N1 and Human H3N2 Influenza A Viruses 2008 May 23; 4(5):e1000072.

Links and Info

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