

SWINE FLU

INFORMATION AND ADVICE FOR UNIVERSITIES AND FE COLLEGES

Throughout this pandemic of swine flu, the Northern Ireland Executive advises that Higher and Further Education Institutions should continue to operate as normal, while remaining alert to any students, staff or visitors exhibiting flu-like symptoms.

NB. This guidance is intended to provide a basis for planning and preparation across both the Further and the Higher Education sectors

PEOPLE DISPLAYING FLU-LIKE SYMPTOMS

If one of your staff, students or visitors are displaying flu-like symptoms they should be advised to stay at home and call the Northern Ireland Swine Flu Helpline on **0800 0514 142** (Mon - Fri 9 - 5) or the National Pandemic Flu Service on **0800 1 513 100** or textphone **0800 1 516 200**.

WHERE TO FIND MORE INFORMATION

The most accurate public information on the current situation can be found here:

NI Direct: www.nidirect.gov.uk/index/health-and-well-being/swine-flu.htm

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS):
www.dhsspsni.gov.uk

Public Health Agency: www.publichealth.hscni.net

HSCNI Swine Flu Helpline: **0800 0514 142**

Details of the Northern Ireland Contingency Plan for Health Response for an Influenza Pandemic can be found here:

<http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/ni-contingency-plan-for-health-response-for-fluenza-pandemic.pdf>

All Higher and Further Education Institutions are advised to urgently review their business continuity plans to ensure they are prepared for action.

Some general guidance to assist with the planning and preparation for Higher and Further Education Institutions is provided in the questions and answers below.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

What should be considered for our business continuity plan?

Plans should be based on the assumption that your establishment will remain open throughout the pandemic, although you may need to scale down certain operations. You should:

- Analyse the potential impact of staff or student absenteeism on day-to-day operations
- Determine priorities and consider whether there are services that could be scaled down and/or suspended should it prove necessary
- Agree how priority activities will be maintained through the pandemic
- Ensure all role holders within the plan have appointed deputies who understand their role and responsibilities in the event of them being required
- Make sure there are up to date contact lists of names, phone numbers and addresses for all staff and students.
- Consider your policies for staff absences eg to include staff taking time off to care for a sick member of their family
- You must ensure that your plans take account of the needs of students with **learning difficulties** to ensure that they can identify symptoms and that they are clear on the precautions that can be taken.
- You must ensure that your plans also take account of the needs of **international students**.
- Consider how you would manage any media interest, including preparing a number of standard responses and identifying spokespersons
- Ensure you know who to contact at your local Health Protection Agency
- Review your supply chain and ensure critical suppliers on whom the institution is reliant, eg fuel, cleaning contractors, caterers, have adequate plans in place to maintain provision of service.
- Check the coverage of your insurance policies
- Consider plans for providing continuity of education

Who makes the decision about whether we should close or scale down our operations?

Higher and Further Education Institutions should continue to make their own decisions regarding scaling down operations, with expert advice from their local Health Protection Agency services.

Such decisions are matters for vice-chancellors, principals, Directors, governors and other senior managers. You should ensure that all concerned are clear about the decision-making responsibilities and the process for keeping the institution open, reducing operations, or for implementing its closure.

Institutions should plan for a range of scenarios – staying open, reducing operations, and/or closing to students during a pandemic.

How will we know when to take further action?

Ensure a process is in place to monitor the impact of the pandemic across your institution. Consider any organisational ‘trigger points’ for further action. These will include a possible shortage of lecturing, cleaning, maintenance and security staff.

As with wider Business Continuity Planning, you should also think about severe disruption to the public transport network and power cuts or other utility failures, although there is currently no suggestion that these are expected.

What advice should I give to staff and students?

- **Keep staff and students informed** and direct them towards general background information [i.e. www.nidirect.gov.uk/index/health-and-well-being/swine-flu.htm].
- The **risk of infection** can be reduced significantly by ensuring good standards of personal hygiene. Staff, students and visitors should be reminded of good hygiene practice at every opportunity, including:
 - Washing hands frequently with soap and water to reduce the spread of virus from your hands to your face or to other people
 - Covering your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing, using a tissue when possible
 - Disposing of dirty tissues promptly and carefully
 - Cleaning hard surfaces (such as door handles) frequently using a normal cleaning product
- The UK wide ‘Catch it, Bin It, Kill It’ campaign aims to encourage good hygiene practices. To find out more and / or download / order posters, please visit <http://www.healthandcareni.co.uk/>

How should we engage with the students’ union?

You should keep in close contact with your Student Union, if you have one, and involve them at all stages of the planning process, especially given its potentially substantial role in induction activities, social programmes etc. It may also be helpful to make arrangements for the students’ union to report on potential swine flu cases because its officers and staff may become aware of them first.

Students should be encouraged to consider setting up ‘**flu buddy schemes**’, so that those who have not been affected by the virus can support those that have (every effort should be made to ensure that physical contact is kept to a minimum). This may be of particular value for students living alone with no local or family support.

How should we prepare for the start of the new academic year in September?

Further and Higher Education Institutions are advised to include guidance on swine flu in new students' welcome packs. This should include standard hygiene advice and the number of the Northern Ireland Swine Flu Helpline (**0800 0514 142** (Mon - Fri 9 - 5)) or the National Pandemic Flu Service (**0800 1 513 100** or textphone **0800 1 516 200**) where appropriate.

It would be useful to include an A5 copy of the NHS 'Catch It, Bin It, Kill It' poster. [Find out more information about Catch it, Bin It, Kill It and download/order posters - http://www.healthandcareni.co.uk/](http://www.healthandcareni.co.uk/) .

It may be useful to supply this poster to returning students as well.

New residential students should be registered with a local GP, but remember: you do not need to be registered with a GP to get treatment/Tamiflu.

There has been some discussion in the press about schools being advised to close during a pandemic. Would Higher and Further Education Institutions be advised to close?

Due to various factors, such as hygiene, children have previously played an important role in spreading virus, during seasonal influenza as well as during a previous pandemic. In contrast, the students, staff and users of Higher and Further Education Institutions are mostly adults, who are more likely to take precautions and adjust their behaviour during a pandemic.

There is no reason to think that closing Higher and Further Education Institutions would provide any benefit. This is under constant review, however, and there may be changes if circumstances and scientific evidence change.

If you require further information from DEL please contact us:

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