

## **Swine Flu**

### **Summary**

Roy Taylor, the Department of Health's National Director for Social Care Flu Resilience, is attending the Board to update members on how DH is supporting the social care sector during the swine flu outbreak.

After a short presentation, members will have an opportunity to put questions to Roy Taylor and discuss the issues raised.

The purpose of this background paper is to provide an overview of the current swine flu situation and the LGA Group response, and to highlight the key issues facing the social care sector.

The figures quoted in this report are the most recent available at the time of writing.

### **Recommendations**

That members note the background paper and provide any further steer on the LGA Group response to swine flu.

### **Action**

Officers to take forward appropriate actions.

## Swine Flu

### Background

The readiness of the social care sector to respond to a swine flu outbreak is a key priority for local and central government.

Roy Taylor, the Department of Health's National Director for Social Care Flu Resilience, was appointed in July 2009 to help ensure that all social care organisations in England build on the robust planning that is already in place to deal with a flu pandemic. Roy gave a presentation at the LGA swine flu briefing in Birmingham in July, and he also met with Lead Members of the Community Wellbeing Board at the National Children and Adult Services Conference in October.

### Current Situation – at 12 November (latest available figures for this report)

Rates of swine flu continue to increase, but more steadily than first expected. There were an estimated 64,000 new swine flu cases in the past week, down from 84,000 the week before. However, the half term week casts a 'two week' shadow and we cannot be certain that these figures represent the complete picture or confirm the trend as yet. Swine flu continues to mainly affect the 5 to 14 and 15 to 24 year olds. The disease is mild in most people, but is proving severe in a small minority of cases, and intensive care capacity is a big issue. As of 12 November, there have been 176 deaths in the UK, with 124 in England, 33 in Scotland, 11 in Northern Ireland and 8 in Wales. Globally, 6255 people with swine flu have died.

On 22 October 2009, revised planning guidance was issued to local resilience officers. This latest analysis by the government suggests that the impact of swine flu is likely to be much less severe than initially anticipated. This is good news although it is still possible that the virus will behave in an unpredictable way. The revised worst case scenario assumptions are:

- Children under 16 are significantly more susceptible to the virus, and up to 30% may fall ill during this second wave.
- However, the worst-case clinical attack rate across the population as a whole has now been reduced from 30% to 12% between now and the end of the normal flu season.

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- This means that in the peak week of the pandemic up to 1.5 million people may become ill and 5% of people could be absent from work, compared to the 12% previously thought possible.

Local authorities have well rehearsed plans in place to deal with a 'second wave' of swine flu. Working at the local level, councils are fully in touch with communities and health professionals to ensure people get help when needed. There are plans in place so that front line services are not adversely affected in all but the most exceptional circumstances. Thus far swine flu has not put local government services under severe pressure but councils are not complacent and continue to test and refine their plans.

As a point of reference, up to 8,000 people die every year from seasonal flu. This compares with a worst case scenario planning assumption of up to 1,000 deaths from swine flu. The big difference is that swine flu is mainly affecting younger people. This means absence from school and work is likely to be a bigger issue than with seasonal flu which affects older people the most seriously.

## LGA Group Response

The LGA Group provides timely support to councillors and officers so that everyone has up to date information and we can raise emerging issues at national level.

Our actions include:

- A rota of Leaders and Chief Executives continues to represent local government at the Cabinet level Civil Contingencies Committee.
- Advice to government on issues including the readiness of the social care sector, vaccinating frontline social care staff, supporting schools and planning to manage excess deaths.
- Regular briefings and updates on the LGA website contain the latest information and signposts to relevant guidance.
- Regular email updates to local resilience officers and targeted support. For example, LGA presented at Slough Borough Council's swine flu workshop for elected members on 3 November.
- Sharing good practice via case studies on the swine flu Community of Practice.
- Advice to councils from LGE on workforce issues and from LACORS on protecting regulatory staff.

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We are also carrying out a national survey to ensure that our work is fully informed by the sector and lessons are learnt to inform future responses to pandemic flu.

## Government Response

Swine flu is a health emergency so Andy Burnham MP, Secretary of State for Health, is the lead Minister for coordinating government's response. He chairs the regular meetings of the Civil Contingencies Committee, at which LGA is also represented by a rota of councillors.

The government's primary aim is to guide and support integrated contingency planning and preparations for pandemic influenza across government, in health and social care and in public and private sector organisations. Government also provides a range of resources and tools to assist social care in responding to swine flu and Roy Taylor will cover this in his presentation to the Board. Key points to note are:

- A self assessment questionnaire was issued in October to all local authorities regarding social care and resilience. This will give us a baseline on which to assess the state of readiness in social care in England, not simply about pandemic flu. Findings should be available early in December.
- Exercise Prometheus, which tests social care and partners' pandemic flu resilience, is now available for all DASS and partner agencies to use. The Department of Health has received positive feedback from councils who have used it.
- Roy Taylor and his team is visiting ADASS regions to meet with all directors, often with Government Office colleagues, in order to consider local experiences and resilience regarding pandemic flu, to update directors and to look ahead to next steps.

## Key issues for social care

### The readiness of the social care sector

The 2004 Civil Contingencies Act places a statutory duty on local authorities to plan for the continuation of essential services in the event of an emergency. Social care services are central to these plans.

The mix of providers and size of the social care sector pose significant challenges for resilience planning; the main one being the maintenance of safeguarding services and protecting vulnerable people in the face of large staff absences.

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So far the current swine flu outbreak has not put social care services under significant extra pressure but is proving to be an important test of resilience planning. It has, however, highlighted a need to improve the intelligence we hold about the readiness of the social care sector, especially amongst voluntary and private providers.

To help address this, Roy Taylor recently piloted improvements to how we assess social care readiness for pandemic flu, and following evaluation, improvements are about to be rolled out in England.

#### **Embedding resilience in the local authority**

A small but growing number of councils have a joint Director of Public Health, and this has proved to be invaluable during the swine flu outbreak. There are also a few councils (for example, Sheffield, Lancashire and Essex) who have placed emergency planning officers in social care departments. Again, feedback is that this model is helping to make sure that social care buys into resilience work. These are the kind of lessons that the LGA Group is keen to share with the sector.

#### **Partnership working**

Social care has an important role to play in supporting the health response locally by maintaining essential services, helping to prevent unnecessary demand on hospitals at a time of extreme pressure and in reaching at risk communities.

Generally the relationship between PCTs and local authorities is working well in relation to swine flu, with strong partnership working through the Local Resilience Forum. Most local authorities are working closely with public health colleagues to track and respond to the spread of swine flu. Some councils, such as Birmingham, co-locate NHS staff in council resilience teams and this is felt to be very beneficial.

#### **Protecting front line social care staff against swine flu**

The LGA successfully lobbied for front line social care workers to be included in the government's definition of 'priority workers'. Along with front line NHS workers and clinical priority groups, front line social care workers will be among the first to receive the swine flu vaccination if they wish to have it.

From 26 October every PCT started to receive vaccines. Some councils have already started to vaccinate eligible workers and we expect most councils to start offering the vaccine in approximately two to three weeks time, subject to delivery schedules and local readiness. The Department of Health has allocated funding to help councils meet the costs of vaccinating independent sector workers, personal assistants and the council's directly managed social care workers.

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This is good news at a time of budget pressures and further detail was sent to councils on 10 November. The process for vaccinating staff will vary between local areas but councils must be able to prove that they have adopted the most cost effective option available to them and will be required to complete a simple audit trail for the Department of Health. Councils are also working hard to promote take-up, which tends to be low amongst health professionals.

### **The role of elected members**

As community leaders, councillors have a vital role to play in leading and scrutinising the partnership response to swine flu, keeping in touch with diverse communities and ensuring that the council itself has robust resilience plans in place. The LGA is about to send a swine flu update to Executive Members for children's and adult services, and the IDeA has published a swine flu guide specifically for councillors.

Birmingham's Health Overview and Scrutiny committee recently reviewed local partners' response to the outbreak and identified some early lessons which are informing the city's response to the second wave. These included issuing clear guidance about the process for school closures and the importance of effective communication channels to reach diverse communities. The LGA is helping to spread lessons learnt across the sector via **first** magazine and regular email updates to local resilience officers.

### **Informal Carers**

Government is starting to discuss how best to roll out the swine flu vaccination programme beyond the current priority groups. It is likely that phase two will start towards the end of this year and a number of options are likely to be discussed, such as a schools based vaccination programme or targeting business critical job groups. Lead Members of the Community Wellbeing Board have already expressed our view that we believe informal carers should be especially encouraged to receive the vaccine because they provide similar personal care to front line social care staff. LGA will influence this debate through our membership of the Civil Contingencies Committee and by the time of the Board we should be able to share further information.

### **Financial Implications**

Government is making a contribution towards the cost of vaccinating front line social care workers and a letter was circulated to local authorities on 10 November.

## **Implications for Wales**

Health policy is a devolved matter so the Welsh Assembly is responsible for Welsh policy on the swine flu vaccination programme, but a consistent approach is being followed by health Ministers in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Contact Officer: Laura Caton  
Phone No: 020 7664 3154  
Email: [laura.caton@lga.gov.uk](mailto:laura.caton@lga.gov.uk)