

# **Pandemic Flu**

## Patient and visitor information

### **What is the purpose of this leaflet?**

This information is for patients, relatives and carers. It will help you and your family to protect yourself in the event of a flu pandemic.

### **What is a pandemic?**

An infection that spreads rapidly to affect most countries and regions around the world is called a pandemic.

Pandemic flu is likely to be more serious than ordinary winter flu and, like ordinary winter flu, some people will get it worse than others. The usual winter flu vaccine may not protect against a pandemic strain of flu.

### **Who is at risk?**

When a flu pandemic starts everyone will be at risk of an infection. However, certain people may be at greater risk than others. We will know more when a virus starts to spread. Those who are more at risk of winter flu are:

- people over the age of 65
- people with existing medical conditions such as lung, kidney or heart disease, diabetes or cancer
- people who have problems with their immune systems due to illnesses or treatments e.g. HIV/AIDS or transplant patients
- young children

### **Should I still have my usual winter flu jab?**

Yes. It is very important that if you are in any of the higher risk groups you still have your usual winter flu jab. This will protect you from the normal winter flu and its complications but not pandemic flu.

### **Is there a vaccine for pandemic flu?**

A vaccine against pandemic flu will not be available before the start of a pandemic. The virus causing the pandemic will be new. It usually takes about six months to develop a vaccine for a new strain of the flu virus.

### **What are the symptoms?**

Symptoms of the flu generally include: high fever, headache, muscle aches and pains, fatigue, cough, sore throat and a runny nose. It may take three days to get symptoms after you catch flu (the incubation period).

Flu is very infectious. It is much more serious than the common cold and you may feel ill for up to two weeks. The flu virus is passed on through sneezing or coughing and from hands contaminated with the virus.

Remember, anyone can get flu. Being fit, active and healthy will not prevent you from becoming ill, but it may help you recover quicker if you are.

### **How can I protect myself and others from flu?**

- cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, throw the tissue away in a bin after you use it and then wash your hands with soap and water
- avoid people who are sick
- if you get flu, stay at home and avoid public places
- try not to touch your eyes, nose or mouth as germs often spread this way
- always wash your hands before handling food and before eating

### **What should I do if I think I have flu?**

- stay at home and rest
- drink plenty of fluids
- use paracetamol (if not contra-indicated) to reduce aches and pains
- call NHS 111 if you need advice

### **Can I visit hospital if I have flu?**

Flu may be spread to patients and staff by visitors, so if you have flu:

- do not visit patients in hospital until you are well
- if you have a hospital appointment, let the hospital know and you will be given a new appointment date
- if your admission/appointment is urgent, inform the hospital so protective measures can be put in place

### **What else can I do to keep healthy?**

There are a number of things you can do to help:

- fruit and vegetables keep your body healthy as they supply you with vitamins and minerals - at least five portions a day are recommended
- drink plenty of water - you need to drink about eight cups of fluid a day; tea and coffee should only be drunk in moderation
- take regular exercise - walk wherever possible but do something you enjoy, as you are more likely to keep it up

### **Further questions:**

Should you have any further concerns or questions then please do not hesitate to speak to the ward staff or ask them to contact a member of the hospital's infection prevention and control team:

### **Infection Prevention & Control Team**

**Tel: 01342 414341**

The infection prevention and control team are:

Sheila Loveridge – Lead Infection Control Nurse Specialist  
Sarah Prevett - Infection Control Nurse Specialist  
A Consultant Microbiologist  
Jo Thomas - Director of Infection Prevention and Control

**Please ask if you would like this leaflet in larger print or an alternative format.**

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