



## PLANNING FOR A HUMAN FLU PANDEMIC

### ADVICE TO PARENTS FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

***Experts advise that a flu pandemic is inevitable, but cannot say when it will happen. All government departments are planning ahead, and advising businesses and organisations to plan and be ready. We have prepared this short note for parents and carers as part of a package of guidance to schools. The publication of this information is part of the Government's ongoing contingency planning and does not mean that the probability of a pandemic has changed.***

#### **What is pandemic flu?**

Pandemic flu is a type of influenza that occurs every few decades and which spreads rapidly to affect most countries and regions around the world. The symptoms of pandemic flu are similar to those of 'ordinary' flu but are usually more severe.

For more details about pandemic flu read the leaflet 'Pandemic Flu - Important information for you and your family', available from the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) on 028 90 522453 or alternatively at <http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/pandemicflu-family.pdf>

#### **What you should do now**

Help your child's school by making sure they have up to date contact details for you: your address, telephone numbers (home, work and mobile) and e-mail as appropriate. They will want to pass on advice to you when a pandemic is on its way and after it arrives.

Teach and encourage your children to:

- wash their hands using soap and water;
- cover their mouth when coughing or sneezing – using a tissue is good; and
- throw dirty tissues away quickly into bins.

These simple actions are the sort of thing that every child should do, even in ordinary times, but they will also help to slow the spread of a pandemic.

#### **Communication**

When a pandemic happens, the Department of Education (DE) will make sure

that messages from DHSSPS are passed to schools. As ever, the school will advise you of any actions that it needs to take to protect children's health and well-being.

### **What may happen if a pandemic arrives in the UK?**

During a pandemic, most organisations will try to maintain 'business as normal'. However, it is possible that some schools may be advised to close to stop the virus spreading between children; or some may need to close because of staff being off work ill. If this happens, you will get information from the school if they are closing, and they would also contact you to advise you of their re-opening.

If your child is at school, and the school remains open, your normal duty to send your child to school still applies. If your child shows any signs of flu-like illness, keep them at home and inform the school.

During the pandemic the school may need to contact you at short notice, for example if your child falls sick during the day. This is why it is so important that contact details, for you and any one else who looks after your child, are kept up to date.

Other services may be affected, such as the school meals service. The school should advise you of any alternative arrangements it has to make in these circumstances.

### **If you want to know more about pandemic flu:**

- You can find the advice that the Department of Education has issued to schools at [www.deni.gov.uk](http://www.deni.gov.uk); and
- The latest health Pandemic Flu advice and information can be found at [www.dhsspsni.gov.uk](http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk).