

## **General guidance for staff in the event of an outbreak of pandemic flu.**

### **1. Introduction**

A pandemic is likely to cause significant absence among employees. Current estimates predict infection rates may reach up to 50%. The University could therefore expect a similar rate of absence at the height of the pandemic wave, which itself lasts for two to four weeks. Each complete wave is of approximately fifteen weeks duration.

All Heads of Schools and Directorates should ensure that Local Contingency Plans are reviewed and updated on a regular basis and that all key staff are familiar with the contents and the location of the plan.

In the event of an outbreak of pandemic flu, employees are likely to fall into one of the following categories:

- employees who are suffering with the illness
- employees who acting as primary carers for relatives/dependents suffering with the illness
- employees who are in recovery and may be physically unable to return to work
- employees who may be reluctant to attend work for fear of catching the virus
- employees who are not affected at all
- employees who have been infected and recovered from the illness

The procedures and guidance outlined below are written to support the schools and directorates in managing a pandemic. These will be implemented as part of the university plan to provide business continuity and manage absences due to a pandemic flu outbreak. It will also facilitate the maintenance of accurate monitoring and recording of employee absence through this difficult period.

This information will be available to all staff and heads of school/directorate to facilitate contingency planning and where appropriate, the smooth redeployment of employees.

### **2. Procedure for absence reporting**

2.1 It is the responsibility of every employee to work when medically fit to do so and to comply with the University's sickness absence procedure. This procedure will supplement and in some areas, supersede absence requirements during a pandemic flu outbreak.

2.2 At the first onset of symptoms during a working day, an employee should report the illness to their line manager or nominated representative and return home as soon as possible. In the case of a pandemic flu outbreak, where the disease is both infectious and contagious, it will be important to minimise the spread of the disease by the immediate return home of the employee. It is also important to ensure that the employee is fit enough to return home safely.

- 2.3 In line with the University's sickness absence procedures, if an employee becomes ill prior to undertaking any work related activities, they will be deemed to have been incapable of work for the whole day. This will constitute the first day of sickness, otherwise the absence will be recorded as a partial day's absence.
- 2.4 While it is appreciated that a pandemic will present staff with additional difficulties, every attempt should be made to comply with the standard notification procedures within the University's sickness absence procedures. Therefore notification of absence should continue to be received on the first day of absence, usually within the first hour of the normal working day<sup>1 2</sup>. Again, whilst it may prove more problematic, any additional information that can be provided in relation to work/diary commitments etc would assist the remaining staff in managing the employee absence.
- 2.5 In these extreme circumstances of staff shortages, the school/directorate may alter local notification procedures: employees will be required to comply with any such changes following notification.
- 2.6 Staff should maintain contact as much as is reasonable and this should be at least on a weekly basis. This will facilitate the remaining staff in managing the employee absence through the existing University resources.

## **2.7 Certification for sickness absence**

A Department of Health decision has been taken that in order to alleviate the pressure on medical agencies, doctors will not be signing sick notes for the cases of pandemic flu. (for the first 7 days only) Therefore in support of this decision, during the pandemic, employees will only be required to provide a sickness absence notification form for this period. However, it is important that the employee submits a sickness absence notification form promptly on their return from a period of sickness absence. Failure to do so may result in sickness payments being stopped or suspended.<sup>3</sup>

## **2.8 Sickness absence recording**

It will be important in a pandemic that all sickness absence reported to the school/directorate is input on a daily basis to the COMPEL system using the 'Pandemic Flu' code if the member of staff has confirmed that they have been diagnosed with suspected pandemic flu. This will assist the broader University wide contingency planning through the appropriate and effective use of

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<sup>1</sup> Employees required to work a shift pattern must contact their line manager/supervisor, or nominated representative, prior to the start of the shift.

<sup>2</sup> For employees in posts where cover needs to be arranged and therefore requiring earlier notification of sickness, arrangements for doing so will be agreed at a local level.

<sup>3</sup> A recent amendment to the Statutory Sick Pay Regulations 1982 relaxes the requirements for payment of statutory sick pay (SSP), so if an employee is excluded, abstains or is prevented from working because they are a carrier of or have been in contact with a case of a 'relevant disease', the employee is deemed incapable of working and is, therefore, entitled to be paid SSP.

resources (where resources allow). If the individual usually responsible for updating COMPEL is off work for any reason during the outbreak, schools/directorates need to ensure that someone else within the school/directorate updates the system on a daily basis for the duration of their absence.

### **3. Health and safety**

- 3.1 Staff will need to make themselves aware (and contribute to as appropriate,) of the pandemic contingency plans and related risk assessments for their area and the impact of this on their work. They will need to be prepared to follow the guidance issued in the plan.
- 3.2 Please follow the general guidance issued by OSHEU (and GOVRN) which can be found on the University pandemic website and also on posters throughout the University.
- 3.3 Further information and guidance can be found in section 9 of this document listing links to additional sites related to pandemic and on the University pandemic website.
- 3.4 If having read the available information on the University Pandemic Flu website and associated links; there are still queries regarding health and related issues staff are advised to contact the health centre by email at [Health@cf.ac.uk](mailto:Health@cf.ac.uk) or telephone extension 74810

### **4. Support for employees**

- 4.1 In the extreme circumstances of a pandemic, it is likely that the pace of events and work might place employees under unusual and additional significant stress. Sadly, it is also possible that employees may lose family, friends or colleagues during a pandemic. The University recognises this and would recommend to all staff that those who suffer from these events contact the counselling service or the occupational health service. It is hoped that employees understand that in a pandemic that there will be shortages of staff in these services also. Employees should contact the counselling service via email on [staffcounselling@cf.ac.uk](mailto:staffcounselling@cf.ac.uk) or by phone on ext 79796, or occupational health on [Health@cf.ac.uk](mailto:Health@cf.ac.uk) or by phone on ext 74810

**Death of a member of staff through the pandemic.** Where a member of staff passes away during this period of time the usual reporting of a death would apply. All Heads of Schools and Directors (and deputies) should be familiar with the protocol. However, please contact your relevant HR manager if you need any advice and guidance in relation to this protocol.

### **5. Home working**

- 5.1 The schools and directorates will have identified critical functions in their contingency plans. In the event of a pandemic, it will be important to ensure that all critical functions are maintained as appropriate. Wherever possible/feasible, employees in critical services who are able to undertake their duties from home (dependent on local circumstances and following

discussion/approval), will be encouraged to do so. This is in order to minimise unnecessary exposure to the pandemic and facilitate any responsibilities arising from care of children and the elderly.

- 5.2 All applications to work from home by employees will be reviewed sympathetically by the head of school/directorate or a nominated deputy in accordance with Department of Health advice and following the guidance in Appendix 1

## **6. Redeployment**

- 6.1 As part of a school/directorate contingency plan, it may be necessary and appropriate to redeploy existing staff to cover all functions identified in the plan, to maintain the critical business operations.
- 6.2 Employees working in non critical areas who remain at work could be identified for redeployment to priority areas in order to maintain the critical function(s). It is important to be aware that this redeployment could result in a different role, function or work location. During the extreme conditions of a pandemic the University may require employees to alter their working pattern/hours. The requests to redeploy will be handled sensitively and will only be submitted where circumstances dictate.

## **7. Returning to work**

- 7.1 Employees who have fallen ill as a result of pandemic flu are encouraged to return to the work place as soon as the symptoms have ceased and they feel well/strong enough to return. This should also be in accordance with the relevant advice available from the health practitioners at that time. No one can return to work until the signs and symptoms have ceased.
- 7.2 Those returning to work will be immune to the current pandemic infection. Their attendance will be a significant support for their colleagues who have been maintaining critical functions in their absence.
- 7.3 In line with current procedures, prior to returning to work, employees are required to telephone their line manager to advise them they feel well enough to return. If the criteria as set out in 8.1 are fulfilled, they can return as soon as is practicable. If there are any complications, a referral can be made to occupational health before the individual returns to the workplace.

## **8. Useful links for advice and guidance**

### *8.1 Internal Sources*

#### **Sickness Absence Policy**

<http://www.cf.ac.uk/humrs/staffinfo/policyprocedures/index.html>

#### **Work life balance schemes**

<http://www.cf.ac.uk/humrs/staffinfo/policyprocedures/index.html>

### **Guidance on working from home**

Please see Appendix 1 for the University's guidelines for home working during a pandemic outbreak. Further advice and guidance on working from home is available from the human resources division on request.

### **Display Screen Equipment Policy and Guidance**

Advice and guidance in relation to this policy is available from the safety, health and environment unit.

<http://www.cf.ac.uk/osheu/healthcentre/ochealth/dseassessment/index.html>

### **Health guidance**

<http://www.cf.ac.uk/osheu/healthcentre/index.html>

Contact at [Health@cf.ac.uk](mailto:Health@cf.ac.uk) or telephone 02920874810

### **Counselling for staff**

<http://www.cf.ac.uk/clng/forstaff/index.html>

### **Further information is also available at:**

<http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/govrn/cocom/crisis/Pandemicflu/pandemic-flu.html>

## 8.2 *External Sources*

### **Welsh Assembly Government**

[http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/publications/guidance/pandemic\\_influenza/?lang=en](http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/publications/guidance/pandemic_influenza/?lang=en)

### **Health Protection Agency**

<http://www.hpa.org.uk/web/home>

### **World Health Organisation**

<http://www.who.int/en/>

### **Department of Health**

<http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/index.htm>

### **Defra (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs)**

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/>

### **National Travel Health Network and Centre**

<http://www.nathnac.org/travel/index.htm>

### **Health and Safety Executive**

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/biosafety/diseases/pandflu.htm>

## Appendix 1

### Guidelines for home working during a pandemic outbreak

#### 1. Introduction

This document sets out the guidelines which will apply in the event of a pandemic flu outbreak where home working is considered appropriate. This period of home working will not alter an employee's terms and conditions of employment and does not attract any additional financial subsidies.

The University does not at present have an official policy in respect of home working; these guidelines therefore may be reviewed and amended in light of any such policy being approved at a later date.

#### 2. Approval - Authorization

In the event of a pandemic flu outbreak, the head of school/directorate or nominee may request at short notice, that certain staff implement home working, both to protect the employee and ensure ongoing service delivery. In making this request the head of school/directorate will ensure that:

- the nature of the work to be undertaken is appropriate, such that it can be carried out safely, effectively and efficiently at home
- the employee has access to the necessary equipment/systems to carry out their role effectively
- the absence of the individual from the office will not give rise to operational problems
- the work has easily defined and quantifiable outputs
- the employee is aware of the guidelines contained in this document and has agreed to abide by them.

#### 3. Working arrangements

Where an alteration to the existing working hours is required, this will be agreed in advance, as will the method(s) by which the employee may be contacted during working hours.

Staff working from home should ensure that they keep in regular contact during their absence from the work place. Employees working at home (or elsewhere e.g. another library) will need to give contact details e.g. location, home telephone number and (where appropriate) mobile telephone number, to the designated person in the school/department to enable work related contact.

Arrangements will be in place so that staff working from home, who need to contact the university services for assistance can do so. (Whether this is for IT support, HR queries, finance queries, health queries, counseling, safety queries or to contact their line manager etc.)

#### 4. Health and safety

Most of the work undertaken at home by University staff will be administrative in nature. As this period of home working would be for a short term, employees will not be classified as 'home workers'. As such, there will not be a requirement to carry out the detailed risk assessments that would otherwise be mandatory under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999. However, assessments should be made to enable safe working. Further information in relation to the correct set up of display screen equipment is available from Occupational Health.

<http://www.cf.ac.uk/osheu/healthcentre/ochealth/dseassessment/index.html>

When employees are working from home, the following health and safety guidance should be reviewed. Please select '**Draft Homeworking Guidance**' from the list on the following web page.

<http://www.cf.ac.uk/osheu/safety/generalsafety/index.html>

#### 5. Records management

Whilst working from home employees will need to ensure that;

- they follow the Governance and Compliance Division's advice on working from home available at:

<http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/govrn/cocom/recordsmanagement/guidanceleaflets/index.html>

- all documents containing personal data whose release or loss could cause significant harm or distress to individuals and/or confidential information are handled in an appropriate manner and encryption software used where feasible.
- "waste" documents of a confidential or sensitive nature will be disposed of through the University
- work related documents are stored confidentially and securely
- where possible, electronic documents are saved directly to the University network
- University accounts should be used for University business
- original paper files are not removed from the University. Where this is unavoidable, it should be logged in writing and an appropriate member of staff informed. The papers should be returned as soon as is practicable
- Any loss of electronic or paper data is reported immediately to the employee's line manager
- No employee working from home is to use the postal systems to return or send any records/data to the University.
- all files containing sensitive information (for example personal data and confidential information) are deleted from their workstation after use and the browser cache cleared before exiting the browser.

6. Relevant University IT policies still apply while an individual is carrying out work on behalf of the University at home.

- 6.1 It is important that employee's working from home are aware of the INSERV helpline to assist them with potential difficulties.
- 6.2 Employees working from home should familiarise themselves with the guidance from INSRV regarding security and information retained on their browsers.

**6. Insurance**

Employees are advised to inform their household insurers that they are working from home in order to ensure that their insurance cover is not invalidated.