

11 Pandemic influenza – key national decisions/actions

Before and during a pandemic, decisions about how best to protect and assist the whole population will need to be based on the likely effectiveness and proportionality of the response measures, ethical considerations, the availability of countermeasures and acceptability. Such decisions also need to be capable of translation and communication in the form of consistent and easily comprehensible public advice. Implementing mitigation or response measures that are not proportionate, effective or ethical – or doing so at too early or too late a stage – will damage public confidence and have undesirable health, economic and social consequences.

During a pandemic, some elements of the Government's response are likely to require implementation in the face of incomplete information, or in the context of an evolving picture of the disease and its impacts. As a result the response, and any public health or wider measures, are likely to shift and change as the pandemic evolves, further information becomes available and impacts are better understood. Even if the novel virus were to emerge elsewhere, the UK warning period may be as short as two to four weeks, giving little time to obtain and evaluate available epidemiological or scientific information or review and refine planning assumptions.

Given its compact area, population density and other demographic features, internal spread within the UK is also likely to be rapid – with its peak possibly at 50 days – all limiting the potential effectiveness of planning for a layered, graduated or localised approach. Dealing with a novel virus that first emerges within the UK would place even more reliance on the effectiveness of pre-planning and require a much more rapid operational reaction. For planning purposes, the following tables suggest some of the key decisions/actions that are likely to be required at various alert stages and levels, if the pandemic were to originate outside the UK. It is not – and cannot be – comprehensive or prescriptive. When a pandemic arrives, national and local response decisions must be based on the actual observed severity and spread of the outbreak, its effects, the practicality, effectiveness, benefit, impact and acceptability of available countermeasures and public reaction.

Table 6: Key national decisions/actions

Trigger	Lead responsibility = ✓ Support = ●					Critical information/action	Primary information source
	CO	DH	DAs/OGDs	CMO	Other		
WHO Phase 3							
Monitor risk to UK and potential effectiveness of available intervention strategies	✓	●	● DAs Defra	●		Scale, impact and spread in affected areas	WHO/DH/Defra/DAs/OGDs
Maintain disease surveillance arrangements and international contacts		✓	● DAs	●	● HPA	Surveillance reports	DH/Defra/HPA/DAs
Commission scientific/specialist assessments	✓	✓	● OGDs	●	● HPA	Impact/spread/characteristics of emerging virus	WHO/ECDC/HPA/CSA
If necessary revise advice to travellers	●	●	✓	FCO	●	Scale and spread of influenza	WHO/ECDC/HPA
Respond to any request for UK support	✓	●	✓ FCO DFID	●	● HPA	International situation reports	WHO/FCO/DFID
Test all critical national infrastructure preparedness and response plans	✓	✓	✓ DAs OGDs		● all providers	Audit and assessment reports	All essential service providers

Trigger	Lead responsibility = ✓ Support = ●					Critical information/ action	Primary information source
	CCC (COBR)	DH	DAs/ OGDs	CMO	Other		
WHO Phase 4							
Activate CCC (COBR)	✓		●	●		Monitor and coordinate UK response	WHO/DH/ HPA
Monitor international developments	✓	✓	● Defra	●	● HPA	International situation reports	Governments/ WHO/OIE/ ECDC/HPA
Revise risk and impact assessment	✓		●	●	●	Mortality/ morbidity/ spread	WHO/DH/ HPA
Instigate heightened internal surveillance/ review reporting and investigation arrangements	●	✓	✓ DAs	●	● HPA	Monitoring reports	HPA/SHAs
Review arrangements for investigating and managing any suspected cases in the UK		✓	✓ OGDs	●	● HPA	Emerging epidemiological information	WHO/HPA
Review travel links and advice/ information for travellers	●	●	✓ FCO	●	● HPA	Emerging epidemiological information	WHO/ECDC/ HPA
Review all planning assumptions/ presumptions including case for travel/entry restrictions	✓	✓	●	●		Attributes of emerging virus	WHO/HPA/ CSA/SAG/ modellers

Trigger	Lead responsibility = ✓ Support = ●					Critical information/ action	Primary information source
	CCC (COBR)	DH	DAs/ OGDs	CMO	Other		
WHO Phase 4							
Review implications/ advice for farming/poultry industries	●		✓ Defra DAs			Emerging virus source and impact information	WHO/OIE
Review/test NHS/ social care/essential service arrangements including those for supplementing supply and distribution of essential medicines/supplies	✓	✓	✓ DAs	●	● SHAs LAs	Assessment of anticipated health impact	WHO/HPA/ specialist advisers
Confirm/test data collection and coordination arrangements	✓	✓	✓ DAs		● HPAs	Agreed data set	Regional/local resilience and health organisations
Review options for use of pre-pandemic vaccine stocks		✓	✓	✓	✓ HPA	Options for effective use	SAG/UKNIPC/ JCVI
Review progress on developing a pandemic specific vaccine and arrangements for manufacturing and UK supply		✓	✓	✓	✓ HPA	Identification and characteristics of new subtype of emerging virus. Information from researchers/ vaccine manufacturers	WHO/ECDC/ EMEA/HPA/ NIBSC/CSM/ JCVI/MHRA/ CSA
Audit/review arrangements for additional deaths	✓		✓			Feedback	Local authorities

Trigger	Lead responsibility = ✓ Support = ●					Critical information/ action	Primary information source
	CCC (COBR)	DH	DAs/ OGDs	CMO	Other		
WHO Phase 5							
Revise risk and impact assessments and arrangements for international coordination	✓	●	● DAs OGDs	●	● HPA	Epidemiological and wider impact	WHO/ECDC/ HPA
Place cross-government emergency management structures/ procedures on standby	✓	✓	✓ DAs	●		Information on international developments	WHO/ECDC/ HPA
Review UK assumptions, presumptions and proportionate intervention strategies	✓	●	● DAs OGDs	●	● HPA	Information on international developments	WHO/ECDC/ HPA
Revise advice and information for travellers and UK nationals abroad and consider repatriation arrangements	●	●	✓ FCO	●	● HPA	Information on international developments	WHO/ECDC/ HPA
Review travel links and any case for border controls/ screening or restrictions	✓	●	● FCO DfT	●	● HPA	Actual data and modelling	WHO/EU/ HPA/academic institutions/ expert advisers
Alert health service and professions, enhance surveillance/ diagnostic capability		✓	✓ DAs	●	● HPA	Recognition/ testing/ treatment protocols	HPA/advisory bodies

Trigger	Lead responsibility = ✓ Support = ●					Critical information/ action	Primary information source
	CCC (COBR)	DH	DAs/ OGDs	CMO	Other		
Alert UK advisory bodies and convene as necessary	●	✓	●	●		Emerging epidemiological clinical and scientific information	WHO/ECDC/OIE/HPA
Place all response and coordination arrangements on standby	✓	●	✓ DAs	●	● HPA	Emerging epidemiological and impact data	WHO/ECDC/HPA/other governments
Place arrangements for dealing with additional deaths on standby	✓		✓ DAs			Local/regional feedback	Local authorities
Test response, communication and coordination links and instigate daily reporting	✓	●	●	●	● HPA	Audit feedback	Operational agencies
Agree and implement arrangements for pre-pandemic vaccination	●	✓	✓ DAs	●		COBR decision	WHO/ECDC/HPA/DAs/OGDs
Activate National Flu Line service, national door drop leaflet and other arrangements to inform and prepare the population	✓	✓	● DAs ● COI	●	● HPA	COBR decision	WHO/ECDC/HPA/DAs/OGDs
Review arrangements for supplementing all essential health supplies/ countermeasures and prioritisation should that be required	✓	✓	✓ DAs OGDs			Impact assessments and forecasts	COBR

Trigger	Lead responsibility = ✓ Support = ●					Critical information/ action	Primary information source
	CCC (COBR)	DH	DAs/ OGDs	CMO	Other		
WHO Phase 6 UK alert level 1							
Recommend proportionate response strategies	✓		✓		● DAs	Impact assessments and forecasts	WHO/ECDC/ HPA
Revise information for travellers and advice for UK nationals abroad	●	●	✓ FCO	●	● HPA	Impact assessments and forecasts	WHO/ECDC/ HPA
Review travel links and any case for border controls, screening or travel restrictions	✓	●	●	●	● HPA	Actual data and modelling	WHO/EU/HPA/ academic institutions/ expert advisers
Prepare guidance on association risks to children when schools close	●	●	✓ DAs DCSF	DIUS	●	Emerging data	WHO/EU/HPA/ NHS/academic institutions/ expert advisers
Place response and reporting arrangements on immediate alert	✓	✓	✓ DAs		●	Progress reports	WHO/HPA
Activate NCC and step-up public information and health advice campaign	✓	✓	✓	●	● HPA	Progress reports	COBR/DH/ HPA
Review/revise patient management protocols, admission criteria and clinical guidelines		✓	✓ DAs	●	● HPA	Emerging clinical data	WHO/ECDC/ HPA
Prepare to expand National Flu Line service capability to assess patients	●	✓		●	●	Progress reports	WHO/HPA

Trigger	Lead responsibility = ✓ Support = ●					Critical information/ action	Primary information source
	CCC (COBR)	DH	DAs/ OGDs	CMO	Other		
UK alert level 2							
Revise threat assessment and implement appropriate wider response measures	✓	●	●	●	● HPA	Outbreak progress and forecasts	DH/HPA/NHS
Alert NHS, social care and all key stakeholders	✓		✓		✓	Outbreak progress and forecasts	DH
Implement heightened surveillance/ virological testing/reporting arrangements	●	✓	✓ DAs	●	● HPA	Outbreak progress and forecasts	NHS/HPA
Activate patient assessment/antiviral capability of National Flu Line service and local coordination links	●	✓		●	● NHS HPA	Outbreak progress and forecasts	NHS/HPA
Alert primary care and all professional groups		✓	✓ DAs	●		Outbreak progress and forecasts	NHS/HPA
Authorise SHAs (England) to move NHS to essential care only when required		✓	✓ DAs	●	● SHAs	Outbreak progress and forecasts	HPA/ advisory groups
Consider timing/implementation of wider non-pharmaceutical measures	✓	●	✓ DAs	●	● HPA	Impact assessment/ scientific advice	Field information and expert advice/ forecasts
Distribute initial antiviral stocks to PCTs		✓		✓	DAs	Population and emerging pandemic data	ONS/HPA

Trigger	Lead responsibility = ✓ Support = ●					Critical information/ action	Primary information source
	CCC (COBR)	DH	DAs/ OGDs	CMO	Other		
<i>UK alert level 2</i>							
Update public advice and information	✓		✓		✓	Prepared material and updates	NCC/DH/HPA/OGDs
Monitor/review effectiveness of initial case management/investigation		✓	✓ DAs	●	● HPA	Operational feedback	SHAs/PCTs/ NHS/HPA
Monitor/review wider interventions/impacts	✓	●	● DAs OGDs	●		Operational feedback	Operational agencies

Trigger	Lead responsibility = ✓ Support = ●					Critical information/ action	Primary information source
	CCC (COBR)	DH	DAs/ OGDs	CMO	Other		
UK alert level 3							
Revise threat assessment and review planning assumptions	✓	●	● DAs	●	● HPA	Feedback/ projections	Regional/ operational agencies/scientific advisers/ modellers
Review/implement additional mitigation measures, authorise agreed statutory/regulatory derogations and any relaxations	✓	●	● DAs OGDs	●	● HPA	Feedback/ projections	Regional/ operational agencies/ scientific advisers/ modellers
Develop/implement/monitor national response strategy	✓	●	● DAs OGDs	●		Feedback/ projections	Regional/operational agencies/ scientific advisers/ modellers
Monitor/support local health and social care response		✓	✓ DAs	●	● HPA	Feedback/ projections	Regional/operational agencies/ scientific advisers/ modellers
Authorise use of antiviral stockpile protocols for empirical patient treatment and agreed derogations from regulations/standards		✓	✓ DAs	●		Feedback/ projections	PCTs/SHAs/ HPA/ professional and advisory bodies
Review and issue guidance on association risks to children when schools close	●	●	✓ DAs DCSF	DIUS	●	Emerging data	WHO/EU/ HPA/NHS academic institutions/ expert advisers

Trigger	Lead responsibility = ✓ Support = ●					Critical information/ action	Primary information source
	CCC (COBR)	DH	DAs/ OGDs	CMO	Other		
<i>UK alert level 3</i>							
Monitor critical infrastructure, essential services and business continuity	✓		✓ DAs OGDs			Emerging data	Regional and operational agencies
Review emerging clinical management and mortality/morbidity data and provide clinical advice		✓	✓ DAs	●	● HPA	Emerging data	PCTs/SHAs/ professional bodies

Trigger	Lead responsibility = ✓ Support = ●					Critical information/ action	Primary information source
	CCC (COBR)	DH	DAs/ OGDs	CMO	Other		
UK alert level 4							
Revise threat assessment, monitor impact and spread, review all planning assumptions	✓	✓	●	●	● HPA	Feedback/ projections	Regional/ operational agencies/ advisers/ modellers
Monitor mitigation, critical infrastructure and business continuity measures supplementing/relaxing as required	✓		● DAs OGDs			Feedback	Public/ regional and operational agencies
Review need for any additional legislative or regulatory powers	✓	●	● DAs OGDs	●		Feedback	Public/ regional and operational agencies
Monitor and maintain public advice, information and engagement	✓	●	● DAs	●	● HPA	Feedback	Public/ regional and operational agencies
Monitor/support health and social care response and staffing arrangements		✓	● DAs	●	● HPA SHAs PCTs	Feedback	Public/SHAs/ PCTs/HPA/ professional bodies
Monitor staffing, antiviral consumption/essential supplies and logistics		✓	✓ DAs	●	● SHAs PCTs	Feedback	Public/SHAs/ PCTs/HPA/ professional bodies
Explore options for mutual support as pandemic develops		✓	✓ DAs		● SHAs	Feedback	Public/SHAs/ PCTs/HPA/ Professional bodies
Explore opportunities for gradual resumption of non-emergency care as appropriate		✓	✓ DAs	●	● SHAs	Feedback	NHS trusts/PCTs/ primary care providers

Trigger	Lead responsibility = ✓ Support = ●					Critical information/ action	Primary information source
	CCC (COBR)	DH	DAs/ OGDs	CMO	Other		
Post 1st wave							
Assess threat of subsequent waves and review response capability for any potential impact	●	✓	●	●	● HPA	Assessment, advice and epidemiological data	WHO/ECDC/HPA/expert opinion/modellers
Assess health/social care threat of subsequent waves, regroup and prepare for any potential impact		✓	✓ DAs	●	● HPA	Assessment, advice and epidemiological data	WHO/ECDC/HPA/expert opinion/modellers
Review vaccination strategies/developments/options	●	✓	● DAs	●	● HPA	Vaccine information	WHO/EU/HPA/NIBSC/manufacturers
Maintain surveillance arrangements		✓		✓	DAs	Epidemiological data	WHO/ECDC/HPA
Assess NHS impact and plan recovery process		✓	✓ DAs	●	● SHAs	Operational feedback	NHS organisations

Trigger	Lead responsibility = ✓ Support = ●					Critical information/ action	Primary information source
	CCC (COBR)	DH	DAs/ OGDs	CMO	Other		
<i>Post pandemic</i>							
Assess general impact and instigate/ implement/ support recovery measures	✓	●	●	●		Feedback/ assessments	All sources
Identify and act upon lessons learnt	✓		✓		✓	Evaluations	All sources
Review research results and opportunities and monitor for ongoing effects		✓		●	● HPA	Research projects	All sources
Provide ongoing public information, advice and support for affected individuals or groups	✓	✓	● DAs	●		Clinical, operational and impact reports	All sources