

30th April 2009

Dear Parents/Guardians

Response to the decision made today by the World Health Organisation to initiate Phase 5

As you will be aware, The World Health Organisation's Director-General recently raised the current level of influenza pandemic alert from phase 4 to 5. She stated that all countries should immediately activate their pandemic preparedness plans. The school is monitoring the situation very carefully, is liaising with public health organisations and has already put the Elmhurst contingency plan into action.

Please find attached Elmhurst 's *Strategic Planning for an Influenza Pandemic* document.

Parents and guardians of foreign students should be aware that the school will close, if advised to do so by public health organisations. The student's guardian must be immediately available to collect the child from school and be responsible for making any necessary travel arrangements.

Parents or guardians who are *either* displaying flu-like symptoms *or* have visited any of the following countries:- Mexico, United States of America, Canada, New Zealand, Spain, Germany, Israel, Costa Rica, Netherlands, Switzerland, Austria or Peru – within the last month – are asked to notify Sister Peavot at the school of this before making personal physical contact with your child. (0121 415 2845 Monday to Friday, 07:00 to 15:00)

To reassure you, **all** visitors to school will be asked to fill in a risk assessment form at Reception. Onward movement to any other area of the school will not be permitted until this has been completed. Any concerns arising from this will be assessed by Elmhurst medical staff, who have the authority to deny access to the school.

You will be kept fully informed should the situation change in any way. We realise that it is inevitable that the national situation will cause understandable anxiety. Please be assured that our plans are made in order to ensure that your son or daughter's wellbeing is our priority.

Yours sincerely

Janet Hinds

Head of Boarding and Pastoral Care

Elmhurst School for Dance

STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR AN INFLUENZA PANDEMIC

General Introduction

The World Health Organisation (**WHO**) have recently warned that a flu pandemic “is both inevitable and imminent.” It is likely to arrive in two or more waves several months apart, each wave possibly lasting two to three months across the UK as a whole. As such, our school has developed this policy as an appropriate and effective response to the dangers of this infection affecting our lives and work.

Meanwhile, we will expect always to implement the highest of standards in terms of Health & Safety for our students and staff. We will follow all the appropriate recommendations from **WHO**, the Government and/or the Department for Children, Schools and Families.

This policy is intended to ensure that we continue to keep our students and staff safe from the direct risk of harm through contracting a pandemic virus whilst minimising the risk of spreading the virus. In the mean time, we intend to ensure the minimum disturbance to our students’ education.

Strategies.

We will ensure that all members of our school community are kept informed as appropriate, with a particular emphasis on communication with students, staff and parents and carers.

If human-to-human transmission begins to be seen in Britain and the rest of Europe and it would seem that our school could therefore be threatened by a spread of a virus, then a Pandemic Flu Committee (**PFC**) will be set up and will hold regular reviews of the situation, research and implement preventative action (as recommended by official sources of information). The **PFC** will consist of The Principal, The Head of Boarding and Pastoral Care, The Nurse in Charge of the Medical Centre, The Artistic Director, The Director of Studies, The Director of Finance and The Facilities Manager.

WHO has set out the phases of a pandemic:-

Inter-pandemic period

Phase 1 - No new influenza virus subtypes have been detected in humans. An influenza virus subtype that has caused human infection may be present in animals. If present in animals, the risk of human infection or disease is considered to be low.

Phase 2 - No new influenza virus subtypes have been detected in humans. However, a circulating animal influenza virus subtype poses a substantial risk of human disease.

Pandemic Alert Period

Phase 3 - Human infection/s with a new subtype, but no new human-to-human spread, or at most rare instances of spread to a close contact.

Phase 4 - Small cluster/s with limited human-to-human transmission but spread is highly localised, suggesting that the virus is not well adapted to humans.

Phase 5 - (The **current position** at this time) Large cluster/s but human-to-human spread still localised, suggesting that the virus is becoming increasingly better adapted to humans, but may not yet be fully transmissible (**substantial pandemic risk**).

Pandemic period

Phase 6 - Pandemic phase: increased and sustained transmission in the general population. Past experience suggests that second and possibly additional waves of illness caused by the new virus are likely 3-9 months after the first wave has subsided. The second wave may be equally or more intense than the first.

Flu viruses change all the time. A vaccine closely matching the specific virus in a pandemic will not be available for the first wave. UK Health Departments are jointly procuring a stockpile of antiviral drugs to treat 50% of the population but it will be used to treat those who fall ill (not to prevent illness). Predicting the characteristics of a flu pandemic in advance is impossible.

Current guidance is that people should try to continue their everyday essential activities as normally as possible, while taking personal responsibility for reducing risk of exposure to the virus and social responsibility to lessen its spread. There are some specific issues to consider concerning children, who secrete larger quantities of the virus and for longer than adults. This can lead to a rapid spread of infection in schools, particularly in a boarding school environment. There may, therefore, be circumstances in which the Department of Health and the Health Protection Agency would advise the closure of schools.

Alert Level WHO Phase 1-2: Global concerns about virus mutation

- More guidelines will be set up for Trips and Visits if necessary
- Information is communicated to all staff and students
- Response plans are reviewed in conjunction with Government guidelines.
- Risks are reviewed for each new activity, particularly where there may be a risk of infection
- **PFC** set up and held ready
- Agreements made about minimum staffing requirements to keep our school open.
- Arrangements for staff to take time off from work to look after dependent relatives agreed
- Vaccination is encouraged if this is Government policy.

Alert Level WHO Phase 3 : Inefficient human-to-human transmission cases outside UK

- **PFC** meets
- Protection measures are re-enforced: some travel and some activities may be cancelled after review
- Stringent adherence to government recommendations will be applied
- Kitchen procedures are reviewed as appropriate
- Staff begin to prepare for possible remote delivery of courses.

Alert Level WHO Phase 4 - 5: Pandemic cases outside UK, or inefficient human-to human cases in UK

- The cancellation of all trips and visits will be considered and all staff will be advised accordingly
- The **PFC** will hold regular information meetings in response to changes in local and national conditions and advice from relevant organisations
- School remains open unless specific quarantine for endemic cases in school proximity
- Antibacterial hand gel dispensers will be located at the entrance to the Bistro, in the kitchen and at any other points deemed necessary. Kitchen and cleaning staff will be advised to use the dispensers regularly in the course of their normal daily work.
- Risk assessments will be carried out before **any** visitor is admitted to the school. An appropriate form has been created. Any visitor from an area where there is a pandemic or who has been in contact with someone who has flu-like symptoms will have to be assessed by a member of the medical staff, who will refuse entry to the school if it is felt necessary
- We will impose quarantine arrangements for students or staff who have been abroad where pandemic cases have arisen.
- Staff, students, parents and guardians will be advised not to travel to these areas.
- The PFC will review the arrangements for the Pre-Vocational Programme on a regular basis.
- Staff finalise arrangements for possible delivery of courses remotely

Alert Level Who Phase 6: Pandemic cases in UK

Elmhurst School for Dance will follow the UK Government plan

- The PFC meets immediately
- All parents and guardians will be offered the opportunity to collect their children
- School may be closed (on Government or Strategic Co-ordinating Group advice, or at the Principal's discretion.)
- Daily communication by mail, e-mail and website; co-ordinated by the Facilities Manager
- If the school is closed, students are marked in registers to show authorised absences.
- The school will continue to provide an education by mail, email or other remote means.

In the event of an outbreak occurring during a school holiday, the PFC will contact each other to discuss the school's policy in the light of national advice and instruction.