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Pandemic Influenza Management of Death: Stakeholder update

Background

The Pandemic Influenza Management of Death Stakeholder Group consists of a range of national, regional and local professionals who manage deaths. A list of participants is attached at **Annex A**. This Group is a vital part of the Government's planning mechanism to help Local Resilience Fora (LRFs) in England and Wales prepare for deaths arising from Swine Flu and the possibility of an influenza pandemic in the future. It reports into a Government Interdepartmental Steering Group. An outline of the structure and the reporting mechanism of the Stakeholder Group are at **Annex B**

This email is part of an update that we will issue to all members of the Stakeholder Group for onward circulation to their members, within their sectors and others they represent.

Work to date

The Stakeholder Group has met on two occasions to date, on 31 July and 25 September, with the next meeting scheduled for 18 January 2010. Members have discussed a range of issues and given their views and opinions to help shape and test proposals discussed.

The original Swine Flu Planning Assumptions were published on 16 July 2009 and asked LRFs in England and Wales to plan for a reasonable worst case scenario of 65,000 Swine Flu related deaths. On 3 September, the revised Planning Assumptions reduced this scenario to 19,000 deaths. The latest advice issued to LRFs on 22 October entitled 'Guidance to Planners' (http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/@dh/@en/@ps/@sta/@perf/documents/digitalasset/dh_107428.pdf) brought the figure down from 19,000 to 1,000 deaths.

A capacity assessment of England and Wales, based on the 16 July Swine Flu Planning Assumptions, was conducted by LRFs in August. The results of this were discussed at the last meeting of the Stakeholder Group on 25 September. While some of the assessments were questioned, it was agreed that on these Planning Assumptions LRFs in England and Wales are now well within their capacity to cope with 65,000 additional deaths on top of the normal seasonal flu deaths.

Going forward, we are now encouraging planners to prepare for future possible influenza pandemics, to address capacity gaps above 65,000 deaths. The Pandemic Flu Planning Assumptions have been in the public domain since November 2007 (contained with the Pandemic Flu: National Framework document produced by Department of Health- available from the DH website: http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_080734). Within these Planning Assumptions is a range of planning scenarios. We must now determine what approach we take to plan to achieve the higher end Pandemic Flu Planning Assumptions.

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From discussions with members of the Stakeholder Group, Government Offices, LRFs and others, we have identified several issues that need to be addressed as part of planning for the higher end Pandemic Flu Planning Assumptions Central Government will look into these issues further, though ultimately we expect local solutions to be provided by planners to meet Ministerial expectations. These issues include:

- Death certification
- Body storage
- Local engagement to improve local resilience

Next steps

We are working with the Interdepartmental Steering group to identify how to plan towards achieving the higher end of Pandemic Flu Planning Assumptions. There are also other issues in addition to the above that we have been made aware of, and will consider addressing as part of our work programme. These include timescales, approach and associated issues of communication to and within the management of death stakeholders.

One of the first issues we will look into is body storage. The Home Office, Cabinet Office and Department of Health will convene a Body Storage Working Group to identify issues and seek a range of solutions. The first meeting is scheduled on 14 December.

We are also finalising a Directory of Contacts for professionals who work in the death management process and will issue this with a letter to LRFs along similar lines. This will help encourage local engagement and communication with local stakeholders.

Actions

We would be grateful if you could:

- Note the progress to date as outlined within this document;
- Channel any questions or queries you have to your organisation's representative on the Stakeholder Group ahead of the next meeting on the 18 January 2010
- Note that a letter to LRFs will be issued shortly, copied to all members of the Stakeholder Group, that will have an unclassified Directory of Contacts attached.

We will:

- Write to you quarterly, and where necessary sooner, updating you on events and our progress

Contact details

The Home Office Pandemic Flu Coordination Team can be contacted on:
Emergencypreparedness.queries@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk

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Management of Death: Stakeholder Group: Members

Department
Home Office (Joint Chair)
Cabinet Office (Joint Chair)
Institute of Cemetery and Crematoria Management
Federation of Burial and Cremation Authorities
Society of Local Council Clerks
Society of Allied and Independent Funeral Directors
National Association of Funeral Directors
Coroners Society
Coroner's Officers Association
Faith Communities Consultative Council

