

TRANSPORT FOR LONDON

SAFETY, HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

SUBJECT: SWINE FLU UPDATE

DATE: 22 JULY 2009

1 PURPOSE AND DECISION REQUIRED

- 1.1 This report is to update the Committee on TfL's planning and preparations following the outbreak of 'swine flu' and its subsequent classification as a pandemic. The Committee is asked to note the report.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The UK, in line with many other countries had been preparing for pandemic flu for some years and principal amongst its preparations was the purchase of sufficient anti viral drugs to treat 50 per cent of the population and the planning and preparation of the NHS to be able to respond. Similarly, many other organisations had put plans in place to respond to a pandemic, both in terms of business continuity and provision of necessary care and support to staff.
- 2.2 In April 2009 there was an outbreak of flu in Mexico due to a new A(H1N1) flu virus which was associated with swine flu. The World Health Organisation (WHO), recognising that a pandemic flu outbreak was overdue, had, prior to this outbreak, been at the phase 3 alert level for pandemic flu. As a result of the outbreak of 'swine flu' the WHO moved from level 3 to level 4 on 27 April and from level 4 to level 5 on 29 April as the outbreak spread internationally. On the 11 June, following the judgement that there was sustained community transmission in a number of countries, the WHO declared a pandemic by moving to level 6.
- 2.3 Other than in its very initial phases, the outbreak has only resulted in mild illness in most of those contracting it, the fatality rate has been low and generally fatalities have been of individuals with underlying medical conditions.

3 TfL's RESPONSE TO THE PANDEMIC

- 3.1 A TfL wide plan for responding to a flu pandemic was in place prior to the outbreak of swine flu, and HR related aspects of pandemic flu were addressed in an HR Safety and Wellbeing Policy. This TfL planning was tested in a three week pan-TfL exercise in February 2009 and a report on the exercise was issued in March. The plan worked effectively and no major changes to the plan were proposed as a result of the exercise. The recommendations for improvements that came out of the exercise have been actioned.
- 3.2 Following the WHO move to level 4 on the 27 April, a pan-TfL Flu Gold group was established on the 28 April and this has continued to meet. The three operational modes, Corporate Directorates, Group Facilities, HR, Occupational

Health, Group Marketing and Communications and Crossrail are represented. The Department for Transport staff also attend the meetings.

- 3.3 TfL's objectives during a flu pandemic are to maintain effective service delivery whilst safeguarding the safety, health and wellbeing of staff, contractors and customers by:
- (a) Ensuring necessary alignment and coordination across TfL on policy matters related to flu, including staff safety and wellbeing;
 - (b) Ensuring operational plans and agreed actions are coordinated;
 - (c) Supporting external and internal communications message development; and
 - (d) Monitoring and sharing information on flu matters across TfL and with external agencies.
- 3.4 The three operational modes and Corporate Directorates have each established 'business level' flu teams that are meeting on an as needed basis. HR has also established a pan-TfL team to ensure necessary alignment on flu related HR matters.
- 3.5 In collaboration with TfL Occupational Health, HR and the Flu Gold Group, information and guidance for managers and staff on swine flu and related issues is prepared and communicated through the corporate and modal internal communications processes.
- 3.6 A risk assessment has been carried out and the following actions have been identified to mitigate the anticipated risks.
- (a) Staff who exhibit symptoms of flu will be sent home and advised to consult their GP or NHS Direct.
 - (b) Increased focus on personal hygiene in line with Government advice. Measures include, frequent hand washing, appropriate behaviour when coughing/sneezing, keeping unwashed hands away from face and eyes.
 - (c) In support of the recommendation for increased personal hygiene, stocks of sterilising hand gels are being procured for issue to staff and key contractors. The hand gels are in the form of 50ml plastic dispensers, each of which is expected to last a week. Sufficient stocks have been procured to provide hand gels for use during working hours for a period of approximately 10 weeks. Distribution plans for the hand gels are in place and advice on the use of the hand gels has been prepared.
 - (d) Where practicable and beneficial, additional cleaning of surfaces that may be contaminated will be carried out.
- 3.7 In line with government advice TfL is not proposing to issue facemasks to staff.
- 3.8 Until the 2 July the UK Government strategy was one of 'contain and treat' with contacts of those found to have swine flu being traced and offered anti viral drugs. On the 2 July the Government determined that, with many cases in the UK and sustained community transmission in several regions, it was no longer possible to 'contain and treat' the outbreak and moved to a 'treat only' strategy ie they would cease to try and identify contacts and would only provide

treatment to symptomatic individuals.

- 3.9 In the first week of July the first cases of swine flu were diagnosed in TfL staff and contractors. Plans are in place to monitor the impacts on staff absence and impacts on customer numbers and service delivery.
- 3.10 The Gold Group continues to meet as needed and monitor developments inside and outside TfL and to liaise with the GLA Functional Bodies, London Resilience and its partner organisations and to seek information and advice from Government departments, including the NHS and the Health Protection Agency when necessary.
- 3.11 Current Government advice is that the proportion of the population who may contract swine flu and fall ill is unlikely to exceed 30 per cent and the fatality rate will remain low at less than 0.35 per cent.
- 3.12 It is currently considered that the first wave of flu infections may peak during late August and September with a peak absence from work of possibly up to 12 per cent. There is also expected to be a second wave of infection starting later in the year in the normal winter flu period. There is the possibility that the second wave, occurring in the winter flu period may infect more people than the first wave. There is also the possibility that the virus will mutate to a more virulent strain thereby causing more severe illness. It therefore remains necessary to remain vigilant and not be complacent.

4 CONCLUSION

- 4.1 Based on current government expectations and advice, it is currently reasonable to believe that the impacts of the outbreak on TfL and its staff are manageable with the plans in place but developments will continue to be carefully monitored.

5 RECOMMENDATION

- 5.1 The Committee is asked to NOTE the report.

6 CONTACT

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