

TRANSPORT FOR LONDON

SAFETY, HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT ASSURANCE COMMITTEE

SUBJECT: SWINE FLU UPDATE

DATE: 14 SEPTEMBER 2009

1 PURPOSE AND DECISION REQUIRED

- 1.1 This report is to update the Committee on TfL's planning, preparations and activities following the outbreak of 'swine flu'. 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. On 11 June, following the judgement that there was sustained community transmission in a number of countries, the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared the flu outbreak to be a pandemic.
- 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.
- 2.4 A TfL wide outline 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 were actioned prior to the declaration of the pandemic.

3 TfL's RESPONSE TO THE PANDEMIC

- 3.1 A pan-TfL Flu Gold group was established on 28 April and this has continued to meet. The three operational modes, Corporate Directorates, Group Facilities, HR, Occupational Health, Internal and External Communications and Crossrail are represented. Department for Transport staff also attend the meetings.
- 3.2 TfL's objectives during the outbreak have been 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
 - (d) Monitoring and sharing information on flu matters across TfL and with external agencies.
- 3.3 The three operational modes and Corporate Directorates have each established 'business level' flu teams that have met on an as needed basis. HR has also established a pan-TfL team to ensure necessary alignment on flu related HR matters.
- 3.4 Following the declaration of the pandemic and in line with plans based on risk assessments and recognising the importance of hand hygiene, supplies of sanitising hand gel were procured for distribution to staff for use when they do not have good access to hand washing facilities.
- 3.5 In the first week of July, the first cases of swine flu were diagnosed in TfL staff and contractors. The number of cases of flu in TfL has been monitored weekly and this showed increasing numbers throughout July, with the rate of increase broadly in line with the rate of increase being reported for London as a whole. Absence peaked in late July / early August with some 250 - 300 staff absent with flu at the peak. Absence due to flu has since declined rapidly and is presently at or close to the seasonal average. Typically absences have been for seven days or less.
- 3.6 In response to the increasing numbers of staff falling ill with flu, the decision was made in the third week of July to initiate the distribution of hand gel to staff. The first delivery to all staff was completed in the following week.
- 3.7 As the number of cases of flu had fallen to close to the seasonal average by the end of August deliveries of hand gel to staff have been put on hold, but where staff are reasonably requesting continued supply the request is being met. The number of requests has been very low.
- 3.8 There have been no significant disruptions to service provision in any of the modes as a result of the outbreak.
- 3.9 The Government are advising that it is likely that there will be a 'second wave' of swine flu as children return to school and the winter flu season commences. We are currently awaiting the Government's advice on planning scenarios for this 'second wave'.
- 3.10 There is the possibility that the 'second wave' 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.
- 3.11 In the light of a possible 'second wave', arrangements are in place to procure additional supplies of hand gel should they be required.
- 3.12 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.

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 through 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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