



Government of  
**Western  
Australia**

# Preparing for a human influenza pandemic

Information for crèche and child care  
services in Western Australia

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# Preparing for a human influenza pandemic

## INFORMATION FOR CRÈCHE AND CHILD CARE SERVICES IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Health experts warn that another influenza pandemic is inevitable, although the timing and impact are unpredictable. An influenza pandemic could have serious health, social and economic impacts. All levels of government in Australia are working together to minimise the impacts of an influenza pandemic, when it occurs. In this regard, the Western Australian Government is working with other States and Territories, the Commonwealth government, local government, business and community organisations to plan and prepare for an influenza pandemic. Key responsibilities include managing the health and emergency responses to a pandemic, ensuring that essential services are maintained, and minimising the social and economic impacts of a pandemic.

In the event of a pandemic emergency powers are available under laws including the *Health Act 1911* (WA), the *Emergency Management Act 2005* (WA) and the *Quarantine Act 1908* (Commonwealth) to assist authorities manage and respond to the situation.

This information sheet has been developed to provide advice and guidance to crèche and child care services in Western Australia about how a human influenza pandemic may affect them, and steps they can take to prepare for one. More information about Western Australia's emergency management arrangements, relevant legislation, and pandemic planning at both the national and State levels is available from the resources listed at the end of this document, together with information to assist services develop their own plans.

### Some differences between seasonal flu and pandemic flu

Pandemic flu is different from ordinary flu as it occurs when a new flu virus emerges into the human population and spreads readily and rapidly from person to person worldwide. This occurs because no one has any immunity to the virus. In comparison with seasonal flu, many more people could become severely ill, and many more could die.

### Symptoms of flu

Symptoms of flu in children include fever, headache, tiredness, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, and muscle aches.

Nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea, and ear infections may also occur. Influenza symptoms in newborn infants may be more non-specific. Many different illnesses, including the common cold, can have similar symptoms.

Recent studies have shown that children less than 2 years of age are more likely than older children to be admitted to hospital with serious complications if they get the flu. These complications can include pneumonia (an illness in which the lungs get infected and inflamed), dehydration (when a child is too sick to drink enough fluids and his or her body loses too much water), or a worsening of long-term medi-

cal problems like heart disease or asthma. In rare cases, complications from the flu can lead to death.

The symptoms of pandemic flu would probably be similar to those of seasonal flu, but they could be more severe and cause more serious complications.

### How long is a person with the flu infectious?

Studies show that most healthy adults may be able to infect others from 1 day prior to becoming sick and for 5 days after they first develop symptoms. In children 5-12 years of age the influenza virus remains infectious for up to 14 days from just prior to the onset of symptoms. In pre-school children this period can extend up to 21 days.

### How is flu spread?

Influenza viruses are most commonly spread when an infected person sneezes or coughs directly onto another person, or when someone touches respiratory secretions on another person or surface and then touches their own mouth, nose or eyes.

Young children in particular, are highly efficient transmitters of respiratory infections, both among themselves and to adults in their families. For this reason, taking steps to reduce the spread of infection among children will be among the most effective ways of reducing rates of infection during an influenza pandemic.

## How does all this relate to crèche and child care services?

In the event of a pandemic, the government's approach to the provision of crèche and child care services will be to continue normal operations for as long as possible. As a general principle, closure of child care services will occur in areas affected by the pandemic or if transmission is found to be occurring in childcare and primary school settings.

Western Australian child care services will be closed during a pandemic:

- ◆ only if it is necessary, in the view of health experts and the Government, to protect the health and safety of the children and the Western Australian community;
- ◆ based on an assessment of the risk of infection, not as an automatic response to a trigger (such as the first confirmed human to human transmission of pandemic influenza in Western Australia);
- ◆ only where necessary - if an outbreak occurred in metropolitan Perth, for example, there may be no need to close child care services in regional areas.

Because many families will be adversely affected, the decision to close services will be made by the Government in consultation with the State Human Epidemic Coordinator, the State Emergency Coordination Group and the Director General, Department for Communities. A similar process will be undertaken to authorise the re-opening of child care services.

## Develop a plan in consultation with your staff, board or governing body

Planning now for an influenza pandemic will mean that you are better able to respond to, and recover from, an outbreak affecting Western Australia. As you develop your plan, you will need to think about:

- ◆ any changes to the way in which you operate during a pandemic (if not closed) and how you will manage if staff are unable to come to work
- ◆ what you will do if you are required to close during a pandemic
- ◆ what you can do to help protect staff, children and family members
- ◆ what you will do if children or staff show symptoms of influenza

### Changes to the way in which you operate during a pandemic

Prior to a pandemic, review the employment arrangements that apply to your organisation and consider how you will manage issues such as availability of leave for staff who are sick or caring for family members.

- ◆ Regularly update contact lists for staff and parents. If you need to contact a lot of people quickly, consider establishing a 'call tree', in which each person who is contacted may, in turn, be responsible for contacting specified others.
- ◆ Clarify staff roles and responsibilities and what back-up arrangements are to be put in place in the absence of key staff members.
- ◆ Consider what functions/services would be reduced or stopped as staff absenteeism rates rise and at what point the child care facility would not be able to operate.
- ◆ Define policies and procedures to screen staff, children and visitors before entry into the facility when influenza transmission is occurring in the community;
- ◆ Ensure all staff and parents are familiar with all arrangements made.

Further resources to assist in workplace planning are listed at the end of this document.

### What you will do if you are required to close during a pandemic

You should include in your plan arrangements for notifying parents and sending children home, and arrangements for reopening once advised that it is alright to do so.

### What you can do to help protect staff, children and family members

The highest priority is to ensure that appropriate infection control practices are consistently and rigorously implemented throughout the facility. The adoption of good hygiene practices by everyone will be the best defence against preventing infection during an influenza pandemic.

Review current staff infection control practices against the checklist below and rectify if deficiencies are identified:

Note that existing occupational safety and health standards and duty of care obligations for crèche and child care services would continue to apply during an influenza pandemic. As for any emergency, crèche and child care services must also act in accordance with directions from health authorities, police or other emergency services.

## Infection control practices checklist

### Keep the childcare environment clean. Make sure:

- supplies of cleaning materials are available
- hand hygiene facilities such as taps and dryers are working properly. If and when facilities are repaired or updated, consider installing automatic or foot-operated taps, dryers and waste bins
- you have plenty of tissues, paper towels and soap stored
- that hard surfaces - door handles, light switches, taps, kitchen worktops - toys and commonly shared items are cleaned regularly and when visibly soiled
- alcohol-based hand-rub is available at the entrances to rooms or sites without hand-washing facilities. *Note alcohol-based hand rubs are not recommended when hands are visibly soiled. Keep alcohol-based hand rubs out of the reach of children to prevent unsupervised use.*

### Institute good personal hygiene practices. These include:

- that staff wash their hands thoroughly with soap and water, or use an alcohol-based hand rub between contacts with infants and children, including:
  - ◆ before meals or bottle feeds
  - ◆ after wiping a child's nose or mouth
  - ◆ after touching objects such as tissues or surfaces soiled with saliva or mucus
  - ◆ after nappy changes or assisting a child with toileting, and
  - ◆ after the carer has coughed or sneezed
- that children wash their hands with soap and water when visibly soiled, after going to the toilet and before eating
- that children and staff cover their noses and mouths with a tissue when coughing or sneezing, place the used tissue in a waste paper basket and then wash their hands.

### **What you should do if children or staff show symptoms of influenza**

When cases of pandemic influenza are occurring in WA, all children and staff should be checked for influenza-like symptoms before entering the childcare facility. Anyone who showing signs of illness should not be permitted to enter and should be advised to consult a doctor. You should notify parents if a child develops a fever or chills, cough, sore throat, headache, or muscle aches during the course of the day, and arrange to send the child home, if possible, and to see a doctor. A similar policy should apply to sick staff.

Where possible, provide a room in which any child who falls ill during the day can be isolated until their parents can collect them.

Nominate a staff member to look after the child, with the door to the room left open. Children should be given plenty of fluids. **Do not give aspirin to children showing symptoms of the flu.** Ensure the room is cleaned thoroughly afterwards.

Make sure that parents are aware that they must inform you immediately if their child is confirmed as having pandemic influenza and has attended your facility in the past 7 days (the incubation period).

If, during the early days of an influenza pandemic, a child attending a crèche or child care centre develops an influenza-like-illness, you should phone your nearest Public Health Unit.

## Public health unit

Kimberley -----	9194 1630
Midwest/Gascoyne ---	9956 1985
Southwest -----	9781 2350
Goldfields -----	9080 8200
South Metro -----	9431 0200
Great Southern -----	9842 7531
Pilbara -----	9172 8333
Wheatbelt -----	9956 1985
North Metro (upper) --	9345 7100
North Metro (Lower) --	9224 1603

Public health staff will make further investigations and if the child concerned is proven to have pandemic influenza, a course of antivirals will be administered to identified high-risk contacts (this is known as 'post-

exposure antiviral prophylaxis'). To be effective antivirals must be commenced within 48 hours of exposure to an infected person. These contacts would then be quarantined at home for 7 days. Later in the pandemic, the policy on antiviral administration to contacts may change. The Department of Health will advise what process should be followed.

Encourage parents of sick children to keep them at home until the child has completely recovered, to prevent spreading illness to others.

Staff should also remain at home for 7 days if they have pandemic influenza or have been identified as a high-risk contact.

## PLANNING CHECKLIST

### Prior to a pandemic

- Review existing infection control practices and check cleaning and personal hygiene supplies
- Encourage annual influenza vaccination of staff
- Promote staff awareness of the risk of an influenza pandemic and involve them in planning
- Review staff leave and other workplace arrangements
- Maintain staff and parent contact lists
- Plan for closure if required and arrangements for sending children home

### During a pandemic

- Practise infection control
- Monitor and respond to official advice and directions
- In the early stages - report cases of flu like symptoms to public health units
- Manage staff illness / absenteeism
- Manage children showing symptoms in accordance with health advice (isolate, contact parents, give plenty of fluids, do not give aspirin to children showing symptoms of flu, take to doctor)
- Communicate with staff and parents
- Monitor situation

### After a pandemic or between waves of a pandemic

- Support staff and families affected by pandemic
- Maintain or restore service as soon as possible
- Review your procedures and revise plans if necessary

## Other resources

There are a wide range of resources available on pandemic influenza and business continuity planning that may assist you to prepare your organisation to respond to, and recover from, an influenza pandemic affecting Western Australia.

### ***Preparing for an influenza pandemic fact sheets***

The Western Australian Government has issued a series of Fact Sheets, available to download from the Office of State Security and Emergency Coordination (OSSEC) website at [www.ossec.dpc.wa.gov.au/pandemic](http://www.ossec.dpc.wa.gov.au/pandemic), to assist all Western Australians prepare for a possible influenza pandemic:

Fact Sheet 1 : Pandemic influenza FAQs

Fact Sheet 2 : Response measures

Fact Sheet 3 : Planning in the workplace

Fact Sheet 4 : What you can do to prepare

Fact Sheet 5 : Where to get more information

Other resources and links available from the OSSEC website include:

- ◆ *Discussion paper : Implications of an influenza pandemic for employment and workplace relations*
- ◆ *Being prepared for an influenza pandemic : a business continuity guide for Australian businesses*
- ◆ *Being prepared for an influenza pandemic : a kit for small business*

### ***Health information***

Information about seasonal influenza, pandemic influenza and how to best protect against their spread is available from the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing website at [www.health.gov.au/pandemic](http://www.health.gov.au/pandemic) and the Western Australian Department of Health website at [www.public.health.wa.gov.au/1/422/2/pandemic\\_influe.pm](http://www.public.health.wa.gov.au/1/422/2/pandemic_influe.pm). The WA Department of Health has issued a [pamphlet](#) setting out steps to help you avoid getting sick with seasonal flu or passing flu and other infections on to others.

### ***Workplace information materials***

You can access a range of information materials for your workplace from the Department of Health and Ageing website at [www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/phd-pandemic-resources.htm](http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/phd-pandemic-resources.htm)

These include posters on:

- ◆ cough etiquette and respiratory hygiene
- ◆ how to effectively wash hands, and
- ◆ how to fit protective equipment such as gloves and masks

The Western Australian Small Business Development Corporation can provide free advice and guidance to businesses to support them to develop effective business continuity plans [www.sbdc.com.au](http://www.sbdc.com.au).

### ***Department for Communities***

Information for child care services in Western Australia is available from the Department's website at [www.communities.wa.gov.au/DFC/Resources/Childcare](http://www.communities.wa.gov.au/DFC/Resources/Childcare).