

PLANNING FOR A PANDEMIC POLICY

Background

This policy has been written and tested in response to an Influenza Pandemic and could be adapted and applied to other pandemics, if necessary.

It is impossible to predict when the next pandemic might occur or how severe its consequences might be. To put it into context, there have been on average, three influenza pandemics per century documented since the 16th century, occurring at intervals of 10 – 50 years. In the 20th century, pandemics occurred in 1918, 1957 and 1968. The pandemic of 1918 is estimated to have killed more than 40 million people in less than a year, with a peak mortality rate occurring in those aged 20 - 45 years. The pandemics of 1957 and 1968 were milder with 1 – 4 million estimated deaths primarily in traditional groups such as the elderly, but many countries nevertheless experienced strains on health-care resources. If an influenza pandemic virus were to appear again similar to the 1918 strain, even taking account of recent medical advances, unparalleled tolls of illness and death could be expected. Air travel would hasten the spread of transmission of the virus and decrease the time available for preparing intervention. Although it is not considered to be feasible to halt the spread of a pandemic virus, it should be possible to minimize its consequences through advance preparation. This note, which will be reviewed and re-issued annually, sets out guidelines in the event of a pandemic together with the School's policy in relation to the control and prevention of flu-like symptoms as a matter of routine.

The World Health Organisation (WHO)

The WHO constantly monitors the various flu-type viruses that emerge each year and categorises the development of each within five defined phases, with particular concern where there is evidence that a virus that emanated in animals or birds has become adapted to humans. At Phase 4, international air travel is likely to be compromised. In any boarding environment with overseas students, this would be a significant milestone. The Bursar, Second Master and the Safety and Security Manager will routinely monitor the WHO categorisation of virus developments and advise the ST of unusual or worrying developments. Advice will also be issued through the ISBA, MOSA and Public Health England.

Planning Assumptions

Advice to all sectors is that they should seek to continue operating as normally as possible during a pandemic, but should plan for much higher than usual levels of staff absence and for other possible disruption resulting from the pandemic's impact on other services. However, schools are potentially different from other settings. Children are highly efficient "spreaders" of respiratory infections, amongst themselves and to adults. There is some evidence that such infections spread less amongst children in holiday periods than in term-time. Thus, closing School for a period might reduce significantly the number of boys infected. Once the nature of any future pandemic is detected, the Government may advise schools to close for a stated period. Our response to any pandemic should cover both closure and the School remaining open. The School's response to the influenza A(H1N1) events of 2009, during which the World Health Organisation (WHO) increased its influenza pandemic alert level to 6, demonstrated that the approach detailed below was robust.

The School's Response

The Bursar, Second Master and the Deputy Head Academic will be responsible to the Headmaster for co-ordinating the School's response which will be graduated according to what may be a quickly changing scenario. Unless directed to close, the aim will be to conduct business as normal within the following:

- The School does not have the facilities to treat those suffering from influenza. Staff feeling unwell or displaying symptoms such as a high temperature will be sent home immediately. Similarly, boys will be referred to the Medical Centre where they will remain until collected at the first opportunity by their parent(s) or guardian. It is axiomatic that the School must retain an up-to-date list of guardians for boys with parents living overseas and their associated contact details. **In turn, there is a clear duty on parents living overseas to ensure that their son's nominated guardian has a full understanding of the School's policy and their possible involvement.**
- Boys and staff deemed to be at high risk due to pre-existing conditions should be advised to stay at home for all or part of any pandemic.
- Central Government, through the local authority, will advise on any mandatory closure of the School when boys and staff would be sent home with the School reverting to its normal security posture for periods of closure. Should local conditions, such as general shortages of food, the disruption of power supplies, or insufficient staff to ensure the proper supervision or first-aid medical care for boys occur, the Headmaster will inform the Chairman of Governors accordingly and order closure.
- In the event that Housemasters should become incapacitated, reliance will be placed on House tutors to provide cover, if necessary remaining in the House overnight. Former Housemasters may also be called upon to assist.
- The continued running of the Medical Centre will be a fundamental requirement for the School to remaining open. If necessary, House matrons may be called upon to assist. If available, use will also be made of agency staff. **Should the need arise, and staff be available, one or more senior student Houses may be utilised as an extension of the Medical Centre.**
- House dining arrangements will be retained while staff are available. However, it may be necessary to progressively centralise all or some meals in the Orchard Centre, with staggered meals times as required.
- Should WHO phase 4 be declared, with the probability of disruption to international air travel, boys living overseas may be considered for return on a case-by-case basis depending on the wishes of their parents/guardian.
- The Deputy Head Academic will manage academic staff absences on a daily ad hoc basis making best use of available staff. In the event of School closure, in consultation with the HODs of academic departments, he should consider what arrangements could be made to continue educating boys by the use of Firefly, e-mails, remote tutorials/work-setting, and Skype / Lync etc.,. Within this, priority would be given to boys approaching external examinations. The Bursar, Commercial and Operations Director and Personnel Manager will manage support staff absence on a daily ad hoc basis, making best use of available staff and will take any measures necessary to support the on-going operations of the School.

International Incidents

In the event of a pandemic incident in the home country of boys from overseas, arrangements may need to be put in place:

- with guardians of boys who do not wish to return home at an exeat or during the holidays;
- for the "quarantine" of boys returning to School from home;
- to continue to educate boys unable to return to the School.

Infection Control

As a matter of course during the traditional “flu season” from Nov – Mar, boys and staff should be actively encouraged by their Housemasters to minimise potential viral transmission through good hygiene measures as follows:

- By covering the nose and mouth with single-use disposable tissues when sneezing, coughing, wiping and blowing noses.
- By disposing of used tissues in the nearest waste bin.
- By keeping hands away from the mucous membranes of the eyes and nose.

In the case of an outbreak of regular influenza during term time, the Medical Centre will produce posters for good infection control. These will be distributed around the School.

Cleaning and Waste Disposal

- **General:** The School Marshal, Catering Manager and House Matrons are to adopt as appropriate the following measures to improve general hygiene as a matter of course:
 - Domestic cleaning and laundry staff are to be issued with non-powdered latex gloves for use in cleaning duties.
 - All hard surfaces in kitchens, door handles, telephone headsets, toilet seats and flushes are to be wiped over with an approved, chlorine based anti-septic solution on a daily basis (Milton).
 - Waste bins are to be emptied on a daily basis with the contents being sealed in plastic bags prior to disposal.
- **Pandemic:** If and when instructed by the Bursar, all cleaning staff are to be issued with face-masks which are to be worn when employed on cleaning duties. The School Marshal is to ensure that yellow hazardous waste bags are supplied around the School for the collection of used paper tissues, face masks, related items. Hazardous waste bags will be collected on a daily basis to a central location, ready for collection and disposal by our nominated clinical waste company.
- **Pre-stocking:** The School Marshal holds emergency supplies of latex gloves, face masks, disposable aprons and other related items of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

Conclusion

It is difficult to determine in advance the likely consequences for the School in the event of a major pandemic. The School should continue to function unless instructed to close or in the event of local conditions making continuation impossible or unsafe. Flexibility would be required by all staff, with due emphasis at all levels being given to minimising the risk through good and responsible personal and general hygiene.