

## **AN EXTRACT FROM: -**

### **PANDEMIC FLU ADVICE AND GUIDANCE: MARCH 2009**

*The original document was produced jointly by the Department of Health and the Health Protection Agency in collaboration with the Health and Safety Executive, the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform and the Cabinet Office. This information was then circulated to members of the London Resilience Business Sector Panel where the BCI is represented.*

## **How Should Individuals Protect Themselves and Others from Pandemic Flu?**

It is important that the following practices are adhered to:

- Individuals should use a tissue to cover their nose and mouth when coughing and/or sneezing, dispose of the tissue promptly and then wash their hands.
- Tissues should be disposed of in domestic waste – they do not require any special treatment. Individuals should not use cloth handkerchiefs or reuse tissues. This practice carries a risk of contaminating pockets or handbags which may then re-contaminate the hands every time they go into those pockets or handbags.
- Individuals should clean their hands frequently, especially after coughing, sneezing and using tissues. Soap and water is a perfectly effective means of cleaning hands; however, hand-rubs (microbicidal hand-rubs, particularly alcohol-based) can be used as an alternative.
- Individuals should minimise touching of the mouth, eyes and/or nose, unless they have recently cleaned their hands.
- Normal household detergent and water should be used to clean surfaces which are frequently touched by hands.
- Individuals should clean their hands as soon as they get to work and when they arrive home.

The use of personal protective equipment (PPE), such as face masks, by individuals is deemed to be the least effective because it relies on compliance and interpretation of guidance, and is easy for individuals to misuse, misapply or fail to use. It tends to give a false sense of protection and can lead to the abandonment of other, more effective, control measures. The specific evidence base regarding the use of face masks by the general public is currently too uncertain and too limited to firmly support face masks for use by the public during a flu pandemic.

## Guidance on the Use of Face Masks

Broadly speaking, the only circumstances where face masks may play a part in reducing the risk of infection would be a situation where a healthy individual was unavoidably in close (less than 1 metre) contact with an individual with symptoms consistent with an influenza-like illness (ILI).

If close proximity (less than a metre) with an individual with symptoms consistent with an ILI is inevitable, then consideration might be given to using a face mask. If face masks are worn, staff must follow the procedures for their safe use, paying particular attention to how they are both removed and disposed of. Staff may expose themselves to additional risk of infection if they fail to use or dispose of face masks correctly. Use of a face mask must not decrease the strict application of other, more relevant, infection control measures.

Without appropriate advice on the proper use of face masks, there is a risk of users' contaminating themselves from the outside of the mask after use.

### General Advice on the Use of a Face Mask

#### ***Putting on a face mask***

A face mask should be put on before coming into contact with an individual with symptoms consistent with an ILI.

- **Hands should be washed thoroughly before handling the mask.**
- Secure ties or elastic bands at middle of head and neck.
- Fit flexible band to the bridge of the nose.
- Fit snug to face and below chin.

#### ***Removing a face mask***

The face mask should be removed once there is no longer any likelihood of close contact with an individual with symptoms consistent with an influenza-like illness (ILI). Once removed, the mask should be bagged and may be disposed of in domestic waste. Hands should be washed thoroughly after the mask has been removed and disposed of.

- Assume that the front of the face mask is contaminated.
- Untie or break the bottom ties, followed by the top ties or elastic, and remove the mask by handling the ties only.
- Discard appropriately.
- Wash hands thoroughly after touching the mask.

#### **Other points to keep in mind**

Face masks should:

- Cover the nose and mouth
- Not be allowed to dangle around the neck after or between each use
- Not be touched once put on
- **Be worn once only and then discarded.**

*Also see: - 'Prepare and Protect' poster, DH 078748[1] (attached)*

### Further Information

*Additional infection control training materials, aimed primarily at the healthcare sector, can be accessed at: [www.dh.gov.uk/Pandemicflu](http://www.dh.gov.uk/Pandemicflu) . This includes posters on the correct use of personal protective equipment (PPE) and effective hand hygiene, such as the 'Prepare and Protect' poster DH 078748[1].*