

## **Guidelines on the Prevention of the Spreading of Avian Influenza in Social Welfare Service Units**

"These guidelines apply to day centres providing training and care, i.e. child care centres, special child care centres, day activity centres, sheltered workshops, training and activity centres for ex-mentally ill, rehabilitation and training centre for the visually-impaired and day care centres for the elderly."

All service units should stay alert, be aware of the latest guidelines given by Social Welfare Department, Department of Health and other relevant departments, and draw up their own contingency measures pertinent to their setting.

Social Welfare Department

April 2005

(Updated in March 2009 as regards relevant websites, enquiry numbers and service hours)

## **1. Civic Education – Prevention of the Spreading of Avian Influenza Starts with the Service Units**

- 1.1 Service units should explain to all staff and service users the importance of personal and environmental hygiene in preventing infectious diseases, in particular the infection of avian influenza. State the serious consequences of the spreading of avian influenza in Hong Kong. Emphasize the fact that preventing its spread is the social responsibility of everyone in the community, and encourage the staff and service users to consult their doctors promptly and notify the service units concerned and Department of Health (DH) in case of any suspected case of avian influenza.
- 1.2 Include relevant topics on the prevention of infectious disease / avian influenza in activities. Adopt diverse learning modes to enhance awareness and concern among staff and service users. They should be reminded to put their knowledge into practice and to heed personal and environmental hygiene in order to avoid infection, and furthermore, convey the message to relatives and friends.
- 1.3 Disseminate the message to staff, service users and their family members through seminars or newsletters, and distribute to them leaflets or relevant materials published by the DH and Social Welfare Department (SWD) or other organisations concerned. Service users and their family members should be provided with such information as the hotline numbers and websites of DH and SWD, etc.

## **2. Precautionary Measures**

- 2.1 Service units should draw up precautionary and contingency measures on the basis of the latest guidelines issued by SWD on the prevention of the spreading of avian influenza as well as the health advices issued by DH (such information can be downloaded from the Homepage of SWD and DH: [www.swd.gov.hk](http://www.swd.gov.hk) and [www.chp.gov.hk](http://www.chp.gov.hk)). All staff and service users should be informed of these measures and in particular be advised of the symptoms of avian influenza. It should be highlighted that, if fever develops, they should not attend activities and must consult their doctors immediately. If the service users are unwell, especially having fever and / or respiratory symptoms such as coughing, sneezing, while they are attending the service unit, they should wear a mask, avoid participating in indoor or outdoor group activities, be sent to an isolated place for rest, carers for these service users should also wear a mask. These service users should then be sent home preferably

accompanied by a family member or to the Accident and Emergency Department of a nearby hospital (if seriously ill) and consult a doctor. For staff, they should be sent home and consult their doctor.

- 2.2 Service units should always remind their staff and service users to be aware of their own physical condition as well as other users'. If they are unwell, they should inform the supervisors of the service unit immediately. Staff and service users should also be reminded not to share tableware, food and drinks with others to avoid infection.
- 2.3 Maintain good cleanliness and ventilation in the service units. Windows should be kept open. Air filters should be cleaned frequently for air-conditioned environment. Objects and equipment frequently touched by staff and service users should be wiped with 1 part of household bleach solution diluted in 99 part water regularly. Metal objects should be disinfected with 70% alcohol. If a vehicle is used to carry service users, good cleanliness and sanitation of the vehicle compartment should be ensured as well.
- 2.4 Liquid soap should be provided in the toilets. Public towels should not be used. Notices should be posted inside the toilets requiring staff and service users to use liquid soap for hand washing to avoid infection.
- 2.5 In organising group activities, good ventilation of the venue should be taken into account. Crowdedness should be avoided. Staff and service users who are unwell should be advised to avoid participating in the activities. Clean all equipments and game sets thoroughly before putting away or used by other groups.
- 2.6 Keep an up-to-date sick leave record of staff and service users and obtain the prior consent of staff and service users / family members for the release of personal data, such as names and telephone numbers to DH for investigation and follow-up action as and when necessary.
- 2.7 In case of an unusual increase in the number of staff / service users having respiratory tract infection symptoms, the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of DH and the relevant Service Branches / Child Care Centres Advisory Inspectorate of SWD should be notified immediately (see Paragraph 5.2).

### 3. **Alert Measures – Staff / Service Users Display No Symptom But Identified to be Collaterals / Close Contacts\* (as defined by CHP / DH) of Avian Influenza Patients Outside the Service Units**

- 3.1 All Collaterals / Close Contacts will be put under confinement<sup>δ</sup> for up to 7 days since last exposure to the same source of infection as the case / last contact with the avian influenza patient respectively.
- 3.2 Service units should post a notice at prominent locations to remind their staff and service users to inform the units immediately if they, even when they display no symptom, are identified to be Collaterals / Close contacts with avian influenza patients outside the service units. Service units should facilitate the Collaterals / Close Contacts in staying away from work / activities of the service units during the confinement period. Such absence can be recorded as sick leave by the service unit and, if necessary, sick leave certificate can be obtained from DH through the staff / service user concerned. The unit should then notify the respective Service Branches / Child Care Centres Advisory Inspectorate of SWD.
- 3.3 If a service unit has learned from other channels that its staff / service users are identified to be Collaterals / Close Contacts, the unit should confirm the information with the staff / service user concerned. The unit may also approach DH for confirmation with written consent from the staff for DH to release the relevant information to the unit. The unit should then take action in accordance with Paragraph 3.2 above.
- 3.4 Inform all staff, service users, their family members / carers of the situation. By doing so, their anxieties may be relieved. The service unit should issue two letters:

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\* **Collaterals** are people who are at risk of exposing to the same source as the probable / confirmed human case. They may include travel collaterals or co-workers in poultry farm / market / retail outlet. The period of at risk of exposing to the source will be decided on a case-by-case basis.

**A Contact** is defined as a person who had been in contact with the probable / confirmed human case during the infectious period i.e. from 1 day before onset of symptoms to 7 days after onset of symptoms if the case is an adult or to 21 days if the case is child  $\leq$  12 years of age.

**Close Contacts** of the probable / confirmed human case are defined as a Contact who had risky exposures including having cared for, lived with or had direct contact with the respiratory secretions, body fluids and / or excretions of the case, or had face-to-face (within 1 metre) contact of the case. Close Contacts include care workers who had taken care of the case without appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE).

<sup>δ</sup> Confinement applies to people who have been exposed to an illness. For avian influenza control, Collaterals / Close Contacts are put under confinement during the surveillance period.

Letter	Target	Content	Remarks
1.	The service user who is put under confinement or his / her family member / carer	(1) State the reason and remind him / her to keep close watch of the service user's health condition. (2) State the support the service unit could provide.	Sample letters are provided by SWD (Annexes 1 and 2). Adjustments can be made according to the actual situation at the discretion of the service units.
2.	Other service users and their family members / carers	(1) Inform them of the situation. (2) Remind them to take precautionary measures to prevent respiratory tract infections.	

3.5 As a precautionary measure, while the Collaterals / Close contacts are being under confinement, the service unit may cleanse and disinfect the unit premises and commonly used equipment using 1 part of household bleach solution diluted in 49 part water for the first time (Metal objects should be disinfected with 70% alcohol) and thereafter 1 part of household bleach solution diluted in 99 part water daily. All staff and service users should also be reminded to follow the precautionary measures under paragraph 2.

3.6 The service unit should keep a close watch on the health condition of other staff / service users. If any staff or service users develop symptoms of avian influenza, such as fever or respiratory symptoms, they should wear a mask, stop attending the units and seek medical help promptly.

3.7 The service unit should provide counselling to staff and service users who bear mental or psychological stress.

#### **4. Contingency Measures – Staff / Service Users Become Probable or Confirmed Avian Influenza Cases**

4.1 If the last day of stay of the avian influenza patient at the service unit is less than 7 days, DH will advise the service unit to suspend operation for up to 7 days since the avian influenza patient last stayed at the service unit (if so needed, individual service unit may discuss with DH and SWD on the possibility of partial opening of the service unit)

4.1.1 The service unit should facilitate DH in contact tracing by providing a

list of staff and service users. DH will conduct an assessment to define if they are Collaterals / Close Contacts / Social Contacts<sup>#</sup>.

4.1.1.1 If some staff members are identified to be Collaterals / Close Contacts and have to be put under confinement, the service unit should facilitate them in staying away from work during the confinement period.

4.1.2 Inform all staff, service users, their family members / carers of the situation. By doing so, their anxieties may be relieved. The service unit should issue two letters:

Letter	Target	Content	Remarks
1.	The service user who is put under home confinement or his / her family member / carer	(1) State the reason and remind him / her to keep close watch of the service user's health condition. (2) State the support the service unit could provide.	Sample letters are provided by SWD (Annexes 1 and 3). Adjustments can be made according to the actual situation at the discretion of the service units.
2.	Other service users and their family members / carers	(1) Inform them of the situation. (2) Remind them to keep watch of the health condition of the service users. Advise them to consult the doctors and inform the service unit and DH if any symptom of the illness is observed.	

4.1.3 The service unit should cleanse the unit premises and commonly used equipment according to paragraph 3.5.

4.1.4 Remind all staff and service users that during the period when the service is suspended, they should inform the service unit and DH without delay, wear a mask, and seek medical treatment accordingly if there are any symptoms of the illness. When DH considers it appropriate to reopen the service unit, staff or service users who are sick, especially those with symptoms such as fever and cough, etc., should still be discouraged from returning to the service unit.

4.1.5 The service unit should provide counselling to staff and service users

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<sup>#</sup> **Social Contacts** are Contacts but do not fit the definition of Close Contacts.

who bear mental or psychological stress.

- 4.1.6 If DH considers it necessary to extend the period of suspension, the service unit should inform the concerned Service Branch / Child Care Centres Advisory Inspectorate of SWD and service users as well as their family members / carers as appropriate.
- 4.2 If the infected staff member or service user last stayed at the service unit more than 7 days ago, and no other person in the service unit displays symptoms of the disease, the service unit may stay open as usual.
    - 4.2.1 The service unit may stay open as usual but the health condition of all staff and service users should be closely monitored. If the situation changes, DH and the relevant Service Branches / Child Care Centres Advisory Inspectorate of SWD should be notified immediately.
    - 4.2.2 The service unit should cleanse and disinfect the unit premises and commonly used equipment as instructed by CHP. All staff and service users should be reminded to take precautionary measures.
    - 4.2.3 Inform all service users and their family members / carers of the situation so that their anxieties may be relieved. Family members / carers should also be reminded to be alert of the physical condition of the service users.
    - 4.2.4 In the event of special circumstances where service unit intends to suspend its operation, it should discuss with DH and the relevant Service Branches / Child Care Centres Advisory Inspectorate of SWD.

## 5. Support / Enquiries

### 5.1 Department of Health

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) : 2477 2772

Website of CHP : [www.chp.gov.hk](http://www.chp.gov.hk)

Central Health Education Unit : 2833 0111  
(24-hour pre-recorded health education hotline  
of DH)

Website of DH : [www.dh.gov.hk](http://www.dh.gov.hk)

### 5.2 Social Welfare Department

SWD 24-hour hotline : 2343 2255

Enquiry telephone number of Child Care  
Centres Advisory Inspectorate : 2835 2016

Enquiry telephone number of the Family and  
Child Welfare Branch : 2892 5177

Enquiry telephone number of the Youth and  
Corrections Branch : 2892 5130

Enquiry telephone number of the Rehabilitation  
and Medical Social Services Branch : 2891 6379

Enquiry telephone number of the Elderly  
Branch : 2892 5400

(Service hours of enquiry telephone services of the Service Branches / Child  
Care Centres Advisory Inspectorate:

Monday to Friday: 8:45 am - 1:00 pm  
2:00 pm - 6:00 pm)

Website of SWD : [www.swd.gov.hk](http://www.swd.gov.hk)

**(Sample Letter from the Service Unit to the Service User Who is Put Under  
Confinement or his / her Family Member / Carer )**

<Date>

Dear Sir / Madam,

Any person who is identified to be a Collateral / Close Contact\* of a human case of avian influenza is required by the Department of Health to be put under confinement. I urge you to comply with the direction. During the confinement period, you should keep in view of <your / relationship between the service user and the recipient of this letter> physical condition, and inform us (Telephone No. ) and the Department of Health (Telephone No. ) promptly if any symptom of respiratory tract infections, in particular fever, is noticed.

< if applicable please add here the types of support the service unit can provide>

In case of enquiry, please contact <the responsible staff> at <telephone number of the service unit>.

Yours sincerely,

<Signature of Supervisor>

Supervisor, <Name of Service Unit>

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**A Contact** is defined as a person who had been in contact with the probable / confirmed human case during the infectious period i.e. from 1 day before onset of symptoms to 7 days after onset of symptoms if the case is an adult or to 21 days if the case is child ≤ 12 years of age.

**Close Contacts** of the probable / confirmed human case are defined as a Contact who had risky exposures including having cared for, lived with or had direct contact with the respiratory secretions, body fluids and / or excretions of the case, or had face-to-face (within 1 metre) contact of the case. Close Contacts include care workers who had taken care of the case without appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE).

**(Sample Letter to All Other Service Users and their Family Members / Carers  
When a Staff Member / Service User is Identified to be a Collateral / Close Contact)**

<Date>

Dear Service Users / Family Members / Carers,

One of our staff members / service users is identified to be a Collateral / Close Contact\* of a human case of avian influenza. To avoid the possible spread of the disease and to ensure the health and safety of others, <he / she> has been required by the Department of Health to be confined and stay away from the unit till <Date>. At the same time, we have taken precautionary measures to strengthen the sanitary work in the unit in accordance with the advice of the Department of Health.

I would like to take this opportunity to remind all service users and family members / carers to take the following precautionary measures to prevent avian influenza infections:

- Avoid touching live birds or poultry or their droppings since they may carry the avian flu virus
- Wash your hands thoroughly with liquid soap and water immediately if you have been in contact with live birds or poultry or their droppings
- Cook poultry and eggs thoroughly before eating
- Build up good body immunity by having a proper diet, regular exercise and adequate rest, reducing stress and avoiding smoking
- Maintain good personal hygiene, and wash hands after sneezing, coughing or cleaning the nose
- Maintain good ventilation
- Avoid visiting crowded places with poor ventilation; where necessary wear a mask during the visit
- Consult a doctor and wear a mask promptly if you develop symptoms of respiratory infections, in particular fever.

In case you want to know more about avian influenza, please call 2833 0111 (Hotline of Department of Health) or 2343 2255 (Hotline of the Social Welfare Department).

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Yours sincerely,

<*Signature of Supervisor*>  
Supervisor, <*Name of Service Unit*>

**(Sample Letter to All Other Service Users and their Family Members/Carers  
When a Staff Member/Service User Becomes a Probable/Confirmed Avian Influenza Case)**

<Date>

Dear Service Users and Family Members / Carers,

We were informed by the Department of Health on <Date> that one of our <staff members / service users> becomes <Probable / Confirmed> Avian Influenza Case. <His / Her> last day of stay at our service unit was on <Date>.

To avoid spread of the disease in our service unit, the Department of Health advises us to suspend operation with immediate effect till <Date> the earliest, given the seven-day incubation period of avian influenza. We will resume service when the surveillance period is over. At the same time, we have disinfected all areas in the premises according to the instruction of the Department of Health.

I would also like to take this opportunity to advise all service users to consult a doctor and wear a mask promptly if there are any symptoms of respiratory tract infections, in particular fever, during the suspension period. Please inform us (Telephone No.

) and the Department of Health (Telephone No. [ to be provided by the responsible officer of CHP ] ) if any such symptom is detected.

We will, in collaboration with the Department of Health, continue to monitor closely the physical condition of our staff and service users. A talk will be held in <Place> at <Time> on <Date>, to provide staff and service users with health guidance so that they may have a better understanding on the issue and obtain up-to-date information of the incident.

Yours sincerely,

<Signature of Supervisor>

Supervisor, <Name of Service Unit>