

Background

In June 2009, the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared a global flu pandemic given that the H1N1 swine flu virus was spreading in many parts of the world.

While the current pandemic seems to be of moderate severity and causing only mild illness in most people, BT is making sure that it has robust business continuity plans in place to deal with the pandemic which includes safeguarding the welfare of our people.

This set of 'people-related' questions and answers will be updated on a regular basis.

At the time of publishing, it covers the following areas:

	page
1. Pandemic planning	2
2. Infection and illness	4
3. Travel guidelines	6
4. Getting to work	7
5. Sick absence	9
6. Insurance	11

Section 1. Pandemic planning

1.1. How will BT manage the consequences of a global pandemic?

We have established a pan-BT team to address the safety, health and wellbeing of our people, and also to plan the action required to safeguard business continuity both for the company and for our customers. The plans will be in line with stages defined by the World Health Organisation (WHO) in its pandemic alert status.

The WHO believes we are seeing evidence of the first pandemic of the 21st Century, after moving its alert status to level 6 - however, it stressed that this change in alert status does not mean that the swine flu virus has become more severe.

That said, the disease is being taken seriously as some people (generally with underlying health problems) can become very ill; also if many people fall sick at the same time it could disrupt essential services.

1.2. Do we have a human resources policy specifically dealing with pandemics?

Yes. We know that the main impact of a pandemic on our business could be a large number of people being absent from work for a period of time. Our 'Safe and Well Guide' explains how we will organise BT's response in a pandemic. See: <http://humanresources.intra.bt.com/index/news/pnews/pnew1608-6august2008-link-2/safeandwellinciduntmgmntguide.htm>

BT's priority is the safety and wellbeing of our people. The situation is likely to develop very rapidly, so we need to apply common sense and remain flexible. We will communicate with employees as the situation develops with BT Today running regular updates.

1.3. Will BT's infrastructure cope if significant numbers of people work from home?

The addition of a significant number of people working from home, both within and outside BT will have implications for bandwidth of the network. People will need to be sensitive to this and work offline when possible, avoiding unnecessary use of bandwidth intensive applications. Within BT, MeetMe numbers should be used for conference calls whenever possible.

BT has some great conferencing products, such as MeetMe, that can help avoid non-essential travel for face to face meetings. Our customers are increasingly using these tools to help reduce the impact of the pandemic and so should we. Likewise, if you have the facility for remote working but don't use it very often check that everything is working properly so that it's there for you if you need it.

1.4. Has BT tested its readiness to respond to a pandemic?

Yes, situations like this are included in our incident management simulation exercises to ensure effective plans are in place.

1.5. Is BT stockpiling supplies of protective masks and disinfectants?

We have distributed face masks and alcohol-based wipes to engineers who work in the community and do not have easy access to washroom facilities. Employees have been advised to follow accepted medical advice that one of the most effective methods of infection control is good personal hygiene. The best way to achieve that is by covering your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing - and washing hands regularly.

The Department of Health's Catch it, Bin it, Kill it campaign, which emphasises the importance of good respiratory and hand hygiene provides useful guidance on simple and effective steps to avoid spreading germs and infection. See: http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Lettersandcirculars/Dearcolleagueletters/DH_080837 .

1.6. How do I obtain a swine flu hygiene pack?

Swine flu packs are only available for field engineers who routinely work in the community without access to hand washing facilities. This group can place orders through normal stores channels using item code 667278 FLU HYGIENE KIT. All other groups should use normal hand washing facilities and equipment provided in the BT or the third party site where they are located.

1.7. Will BT provide vaccines against swine flu?

There is currently no vaccine to protect specifically against swine flu, although infected people are responding well to antiviral medication. Seasonal flu vaccine remains valuable against the other strains of influenza and might help in reducing the severity of the swine flu strain. However they do not offer longer term protection.

On 2 July, the government announced that the UK is moving to a 'treatment' phase to manage the current pandemic flu outbreak as there are now areas around the country where the disease is spreading within the community. Public health interventions to reduce spread are no longer appropriate and the focus needs to move to the treatment of individual patients.

As a result GPs will now diagnose cases on the basis of clinical observation rather than laboratory testing. Everyone who has flu-like symptoms will be assessed by a doctor and may be given antivirals to manage their illness.

Information on vaccination programmes is issued by national authorities, such as the Health Protection Agency in the UK - www.hpa.org.uk

1.8. How will BT communicate with its employees during the pandemic?

BT will use various internal communications channels to communicate with employees about swine flu. There is a dedicated swine flu intranet site at: <http://homepage.intra.bt.com/home/swineflu> . BT Today carries regular stories, including audio interviews with Paul Litchfield, BT's chief medical officer. See: <http://today.intra.bt.com/today>

Agency staff will receive internal updates on swine flu and are also able to access the swine flu intranet site. Agency people must follow all BT instructions with regard to hygiene and operational issues. Any contractual questions regarding pay, sick pay or allowances should be directed to the agency as their employer.

Section 2. Infection and illness

2.1. What symptoms should people look out for?

While the virus is more infectious than normal flu, the symptoms are usually relatively mild. Most people will feel unwell for a few days, before making a full recovery. Symptoms to look out for would include fever (usually high), headache, extreme tiredness, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, muscle aches, nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea. Anyone with these symptoms should seek medical advice and stay away from work until cleared by your doctor.

A quick and simple to use 'flu symptom' checker is available from the NHS at: <http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk/Sat/Topics/WizardStepOne.aspx?Host=Nhsd&SyndicationPartnerGuid=d19370ea-a100-407d-9695-b73407f701c7&TopicGuid=8c903315-a302-412a-bfae-9cb576d4b4cd>

2.2. What should BT people with 'underlying health problems' do?

People with underlying health problems are not at greater risk of catching swine flu than anyone else. That said, depending on the actual health problem, the consequences of falling ill may be more severe and so individuals should discuss their condition with their own doctor. Every person is different and BT cannot provide general advice to cover them all.

2.3. How can I help to ensure that the risk of infection at work is minimised?

Everyone can minimise the spread of germs by observing some simple personal hygiene steps - covering your nose and mouth when sneezing, followed by hand washing. More information about hygiene - including a copy of the UK Government's public health leaflet entitled "Important Information about Swine Flu" is on the intranet at: <http://homepage.intra.bt.com/home/swineflu/hygieneadvice.htm>

In addition, simple steps such as observing the clear desk policy carefully will ensure that the cleaners are more readily able to clean desktop surfaces thoroughly.

2.4. Should people who have been in contact with sick people stay away from work?

No. People should only be absent from work if they feel unfit to undertake their normal duties, are suffering symptoms of an infectious illness or have been instructed to do so by the health authorities.

2.5. What if people have had long exposure to others displaying flu-like symptoms?

The medical profession makes a distinction between what it refers to as either 'primary' or 'secondary' contacts.

A primary contact is someone who has been in close contact with an infected person for an extended period of time (closer than 1 metre for more than 1 hour). The risk of that person catching flu from that exposure is about 1 in 5 (20%).

A secondary contact is someone who has been in close contact with a primary contact for an extended period of time. The worst case risk of that person catching flu from that exposure is about $1 \text{ in } 5 \times 5 = 1 \text{ in } 25$ (4%).

The worst case risk from close contact with a secondary contact is 1 in $5 \times 5 \times 5 = 1$ in 125 (0.8%).

That is why it is sensible to ask people with symptoms to stay away from work in order to prevent primary contact. After that the risk starts to become too low to be effective and the number of people involved would be too great to be manageable.

2.6. Should people not enter BT buildings if they know someone at that site has been diagnosed with swine flu?

People really should not worry unduly about going to a BT building where someone has had swine flu. The risk of catching the infection is extremely low as germs do not linger for long on hard surfaces. The risk is therefore no higher than other aspects of normal life (e.g. shopping).

2.7. What should a BT employee do if their child attends a school that has been "closed" to help prevent the spread of germs?

If the child has symptoms then the BT person will be treated as a contact by the authorities and should follow their instructions about whether to attend work. If the child has no symptoms (i.e. is being treated as a contact) the BT person should work normally having ensured that appropriate child care arrangements are in place.

2.8. When are people with swine flu infectious to others?

People without symptoms are not considered infectious. People are most likely to pass on swine flu soon after they develop symptoms and they are no longer considered infectious once symptoms have gone.

2.9. Should I keep close contacts of swine flu cases away from vulnerable groups, such as people in care homes?

No. People without symptoms are not considered infectious. Close contacts of people with swine flu should be particularly alert for signs of the disease and should stay at home if feeling unwell.

Section 3. Travel guidelines

3.1. What is BT's advice on business travel to affected areas?

As the risk associated with swine flu has become global, restricting travel to specific geographies in order to protect our people is no longer an effective strategy. The risk now relates more to spending extended periods of time in a confined space with many other people – in which germs can easily spread - than to any particular destination. Experience of the SARS outbreak and this influenza pandemic to date indicates that air travel may be a particular risk.

Travel within the UK and other countries is generally not restricted, although we have advised our people to minimise all long distance air travel as experience shows that germs spread particularly easily in this situation. The one exception is that as of 8 July, all travel to/from Argentina has been banned.

“Hotspots” for influenza will vary over time and travellers should check the status of their destination before travel by consulting BT's travel security site <http://security.intra.bt.com/KZSCRIPTS/default.asp?cid=507> . BT people working within “hotspots” should take advice from their local management about other forms of public transport.

Of course, potential travellers are reminded of the current financial restrictions which require advance authorisation for air travel by a direct report of an OC member. If in doubt about your travel plans, please check with the BT Group Security Incident Management Centre (GSIMC) by emailing security@bt.com or calling 0800 321 999 /+44 1908 64 1100 with your proposed trip details.

BT people returning from holiday in an affected area should be alert for flu-like symptoms. If they - or any of their travel companions become sick within 7 days of return - they should seek immediate medical advice and inform their line manager. Details of the symptoms to look for can be accessed through BT's swine flu site <http://homepage.intra.bt.com/home/swineflu/swineflusymptoms.htm>

3.2. Will people working on assignment in an affected country be repatriated?

Repatriation may be of little help in protecting people, so every case will be carefully considered on an individual basis. By definition, a pandemic is a worldwide event and, while there will be “hot spots” at different times, no geography can be considered a safe haven. Air travel may put people at more risk than staying put.

3.3. What should I do if unexpectedly I find myself in an affected country on holiday?

You must contact your line manager before returning to the workplace to ensure that an assessment can be made as to whether your presence would represent a threat to colleagues' health. Flexible working from home or alternative measures may be necessary for a limited period. In cases of return from high risk countries, a quarantine period may be required. If you are aware you may be visiting a country which carries a risk of contracting swine flu, you should alert your manager to this before your trip and discuss and plan measures needed to be applied on your return.

Section 4. Getting to work

4.1. Is it possible that BT buildings will be closed?

It is unlikely that BT buildings will be closed. But if it did happen, a contingency plan would be implemented, which might include advising people to work from home, or from another BT location.

4.2. Will security prevent sick people from entering BT buildings?

No. This is not practicable. We will rely on people having the common sense to take appropriate medical advice and to realise when they were ill and unfit for work.

4.3. Where do I stand if I do not feel it is safe to attend work due to risk of infection?

We recognise that risk assessment can be a complex issue and so we have adopted the approach that, except in clear cut scenarios, you should undertake your own risk assessment and decide whether you consider the working environment to be safe. Flexible working from alternative locations is to be encouraged to the maximum degree in order to maintain customer service and operational delivery.

4.4. What should I do if I am worried about using public transport for fear of coming into contact with sick people?

You should follow the advice issued by the authorities concerning any increased risk to public health. If necessary, managers may need to provide further information or consider adjusting patterns or locations of work. You will be expected to observe the normal rules of behaviour and etiquette and to treat each other and our customers with respect at all times. BT's 'Conduct Standards' will apply as usual. Normal politeness, e.g. in avoiding spreading germs by not coughing/sneezing over colleagues in order to minimise infections, should be adopted.

The Department of Health's 'Catch it, Bin it, Kill it' campaign provides simple and effective steps to avoid spreading germs and infection.

http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Lettersandcirculars/Dearcolleagueletters/DH_080837

4.5. If I could not get to work because public transport stopped, would I still be paid?

There might be some disruption to public transport, but it is most unlikely that services would be suspended completely. Existing arrangements would still apply, so if you make all reasonable efforts to reach your workplace, or to work from a suitable alternative location, you will be paid normally.

4.6. Who can work from home during a pandemic?

BT is supportive of people working from home in the event of a pandemic where this is operationally practicable and feasible for the individual's circumstances. Customer service must be maintained but a sympathetic approach will be adopted to help people who wish to work from home.

Section 5. Sick absence

5.1. Would there be a checklist for deciding to send people home?

No. A decision that an individual should leave work due to illness should be made on the basis of a common sense discussion between the person concerned and his/her line manager.

5.2. What will BT do if people displaying flu-like symptoms refuse to go home?

It is very unlikely that this situation would arise. Managers know their people, and should be capable of making a decision on whether a person should leave work.

5.3. What should a manager do if someone in their team calls in sick with swine flu?

It is vital that managers report employee absences from work at the earliest opportunity, whatever the cause, ideally on the first day of absence. Reporting is through the normal mechanisms – usually the BT People System or Automated Attendance Management – see <http://humanresources.intra.bt.com/10919> for further guidance.

In addition, for suspected swine flu cases only, please email the 'People and Policy G' mailbox (people.and.policy@bt.com) with the employee's name, EIN, OUC, location and post code. Managers should please specify the exact reason why someone is absent, using one of the following categories:

- The individual has swine flu
- The individual is caring for someone suffering from swine flu
- The health authorities have raised other concerns about an individual's particular circumstances which may lead to increased risk by attending work.

5.4. Would BT give advice to vulnerable people, such as pregnant women, telling them to stay at home if they worked in a call centre, for example?

If people have particular concerns, they should take the advice of their own medical practitioners/NHS Direct.

5.5. How will any sickness absence due to swine flu be treated under BT's attendance procedure?

BT's attendance policy, procedure and processes have all been revised recently and agreed with the trades unions. The approach to be taken is that managers should consider all relevant information when an individual's attendance falls below the expected standard and that any exceptional or mitigating circumstances should be taken into account when determining what, if any, action is appropriate. An influenza pandemic is clearly an exceptional circumstance but no absences are automatically discounted without manager consideration.

5.6. What is BT's advice to agency workers?

BT expects agency workers to act responsibly and follow general guidance concerning swine flu. Issues regarding pay and sick pay are a matter between the relevant agency and its employees.

5.7. What is the role of occupational health?

Our in-house occupational health and safety team are an integral element in determining BT's response to a pandemic and changes that may be required as the situation evolves. Background health information is provided for us by our travel health provider ISOS and can be found at <http://urgent.internationalsos.com/default.aspx> . Our OHS provider will continue to handle referrals for work issues in the normal way but does not give individual medical advice and you should consult your own doctor or call the NHS flu line in the UK on 0800 1513 513 if you are in any doubt about your own health.

5.8. What arrangements have been put in place to ensure that employees' emergency contacts are notified, if necessary?

A comprehensive database of emergency contact details for all employees is available. Employees are personally responsible for ensuring that their contact details are correct and can do this on the intranet by accessing the BT People System (BTPS) pages. Click on the left-hand link, 'Employee Self Service' and then select 'Personal Information'. See BTPS at:

<http://btpeople.intra.bt.com/psp/PTPRD/EMPLOYEE/EMPL/h/?tab=DEFAULT>

(you'll need your EIN and normal log in password)

5.9. What should a manager tell colleagues if someone in their team is diagnosed with swine flu?

The manager should respect the privacy of the person who is ill and not pass on their personal details except where strictly necessary. Unless the person was at work with symptoms (which they shouldn't have been) they are unlikely to be a risk to others. Even if they were at work, the risk is low from the type of contact normal in an occupational environment. The manager may wish to raise awareness locally of flu symptoms, the importance of good personal hygiene and the requirement to stay at home and seek medical advice if people become ill.

Section 6. Insurance

6.1. Will the BT Healthcare scheme include coverage for the treatment of swine flu?

The BT Healthcare scheme, in common with most private medical schemes, is not intended to provide primary care but only responds if your GP refers you to a specialist for further treatment or diagnostic tests. It is, therefore, considered unlikely that eligibility for private healthcare would be of much relevance in the outbreak of a swine flu pandemic, as primary care is delivered through the NHS in the UK. In the event of your GP referring you to a specialist, however, the cover would respond in the normal way. Follow this link for more information on the scheme and how to make a claim - <http://humanresources.intra.bt.com/index/reward/rbenefits/9052>

6.2. As an employee on an ex-pat contract, my family and I are covered by BT's International Healthcare Scheme, provided by our insurer, BUPA. To what extent does the coverage protect me against swine flu if there is an outbreak in the country where I am located?

BUPA provides cover for employees on assignments in countries where there is no free healthcare cover provided by the state or who would not be eligible for such state-provided healthcare by virtue of their status as non-residents. So, yes, BUPA will provide primary care in the event of a swine flu pandemic which covers the cost of antiviral medication to the extent that it is available. Further information is available - <https://www.bupainternational.com/corporateworld/> (password required)

6.3. If I contract swine flu whilst travelling on company business, to what extent will I be covered under the company's business travel insurance policy?

The emergency medical assistance section of the company's business travel insurance will provide coverage for the cost of medical treatment incurred whilst travelling on company business and this coverage will respond to claims for swine flu. For further details of the company's business travel insurance follow the link below: <http://supplychain2.intra.bt.com/pandsc/travel/insurance/index.shtml>

In addition, BT employees based in Europe are encouraged to obtain a European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) and to carry it on their person on any business trips to countries within the European Economic Area (the European Union plus Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway) or to Switzerland. The card entitles visitors to those countries to free or reduced-cost medical treatment if this becomes necessary during the course of the trip. For information on the EHIC:

<http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Healthcare/Healthadvicefortravellers/index.htm>

6.4. If I am required to work from home during a pandemic, will my personal home insurances be invalidated?

No, but it is important that you notify your insurers of your change to working at home so that they hold the most up to date information about the use of your home and the contents insured within it. BT is in receipt of a letter from the Association of British Insurers to their members informing them of our home based working policy. This letter can be used in the unlikely event that your insurance premiums increase as a result of you becoming a home-based worker: <http://property-portal.intra.bt.com/btproperty/BTagileworking/HomeWorking/HomeBasedWorker/ThingsToconsider/Insurance/index.htm>

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