

## Swine Flu Policy and Contingency Care Plan - October 2009

This document is designed to present a policy and contingency plan for AEGIS Guardianships Organisations in response to any boarding students under our care becoming infected with the H1N1 Virus of Swine Flu while they are in the UK. The document will look at term time and holiday time planning and contingency. This contingency plan is designed to present our solution to a very real problem, to set out and explain our limitations and to reassure our member schools that a contingency is in place to ensure the ongoing care and best practise for students when they are under our care.

The situation of a swine flu pandemic has come as a surprise to both schools and guardianship organisations and whereas an agreement and understanding of responsibilities of schools and guardianship organisations has been established between us for many years, this situation is a new one and therefore we are both now faced with looking at new problems and solutions to them. This document discusses the following situations:

### Term Time

- *A student or students contracting swine flu whilst at school during term time where the school remains open.*
- *A school closing due to an outbreak of swine flu.*

### Holiday Times

- *A student or students contracting swine flu shortly prior to half terms and exeats arising in a need for care as students are not allowed to travel or go to their allocated host family or if a student contracts swine flu whilst in a guardian host family.*

### Term Time

- *A student or students contracting swine flu whilst at school during term time where the school remains open.*

Our findings show that most schools have a contingency plan to take care of any overseas boarding student in their school who contract swine flu during term time whilst the school remains open. Although they would prefer any student with swine flu to go home and be cared for by their parents or educational guardian, if the student is well enough to travel, they do not insist on guardians removing students when contagious and unwell and in fact realise that this is not always possible. In consultation with these schools, the Department of Health and with the BSA, we believe that this attitude and policy is correct, realistic and in line with National Minimum boarding standards\* which clearly state that a school must provide isolation and 24 hour medical care for their students during term time.

It contrast to the above, it would appear that some schools state in their swine flu policy that should overseas students contract swine flu during term time then they expect the parents or guardian to remove the student immediately with no apparent flexibility or understanding that this may not be feasible and also could contravene the advice given by the Department of Health.

Although all AEGIS guardianship organisations respect that a school has every right to publish an individual policy to protect their school and pupils, we would like to explain the reasons why in most cases this scenario may not be possible from our point of view.

It is part of a guardianship organisation's responsibility to provide a safe place for a student to stay during exeats, half terms, when students arrive early or depart late and the beginning and end of terms and if a student is suspended or expelled. It is widely known that local host families are contracted by guardianship organisation's to fulfil this role. Their care services are not enforceable and it is not in the contract between guardianship organisation and host family that they must take in students who are contagious nor would it in most cases be fair to ask them to do so. In consultation with each other, it seems that amongst guardianship organisations, some have a small number of families who, when asked, have said they will take in a student with swine flu, others have asked some families who have all said they would not do it and others do not feel it is right to even ask this of them. The families who have said yes seem to be an exception rather than a rule and cannot be relied on to stick by this decision and take students nor to keep them. Indeed it would be wrong to ask a host family with underlying health issues and or who have young children or who come into contact with young children.

As host families are our only standard source of accommodation for our students and as we do not have medical facilities or isolation units nor do the NHS provide such facilities, it is clear that as a guardianship organisation, it may well not be possible to arrange for accommodation for a pupil with swine flu and therefore it is simply not possible to remove them immediately from school.

In addition to this, it seems that experience to date tells us that the general attitude of overseas parents is that they also expect a school to take care of their child if they are ill during term time and have in fact so far insisted this is the case and asked guardianship organisations NOT to move their child under any circumstances. Clearly a guardianship organisation has a contract with the parent and is not authorised to remove a student from a school without their permission. We would indeed need a medical release and authority signed by the parent before removing them to protect our liability should the student become seriously ill or worse.

In summary, it is therefore understood that a guardianship organisation should, if requested by the school, try and find somewhere for the student to be housed outside the school if they are well enough to travel and if the parent is in agreement but that schools must accept that if a guardianship organisation is not able to do this that they will take care of them at school.

#### Term Time

- *A school closing due to an outbreak of swine flu.*

It is accepted that if a school closes, then the guardianship organisation will collect any healthy child and accommodate them with a host family.

Guardianship organisations also accept that any students with swine flu are also their responsibility in this instance and although, for the reasons outlined above in point 1, will probably not be able to place them with host families, they should have contingency plans in place to take them under their care. Schools are asked to understand that guardianship organisations will have to seek parental permission and medical advice before students are moved if they are unwell as they do not want to contravene the agreement they have with parents or put the child's health at risk.

#### Holiday Times

- *A student or students contracting swine flu shortly prior to half terms and exeats arising in a need for care as students are not allowed to travel to their allocated host family or if a student contracts swine flu whilst in a guardian host family.*

Guardianship organisations also accept that any students with swine flu who cannot travel home or go to host families during exeats and half terms are their responsibility. They also accept that if a student falls ill at a host family that they are also under our care and should remain so until the student is well enough to return to school even if this spills over into term time.

In summary, AEGIS Accredited Guardianship Organisations want to reassure schools that during holiday times if a school closes and if students are unable to travel, that they will have emergency contingency plans in place to take them under their care and will keep them under their care until they are well enough to return home or back to school. This is subject to parental permission being granted.

AEGIS Accredited Guardianship Organisations would like schools to take their limitations into account during term time and would ask them to accept responsibility for the care of their pupils during this time.

\* *National Minimum Standards of Boarding Schools Inspection Regulations of 2002, Standards 15, 16, and 48*