




30 June, 2009

## Flu Friends

The current AH1N1 swine flu pandemic may become more serious in the UK over the coming months, so now is the time to choose your 'flu friend'. The national swine flu information leaflet that was delivered to households across the county during May recommends that people set up a network of flu friends.

**Below are some frequently asked questions about swine flu.**

<b>Q 1</b>	<b>What is a flu friend?</b>
<b>A</b>	<p>Flu friends are relatives, neighbours and friends who will collect medicines, food and other supplies for you if you get swine flu, so that you don't have to leave home. This is to help prevent the spread of flu and is explained in a leaflet that was sent to all households in Britain. Flu friends are not friends with flu.</p>  <p>This leaflet contains important information to help you and your family. The leaflet is available online: <a href="http://www.nhs.uk/news/2009/04April/Documents/Swine%20Flu%20Leaflet_Web%20Version.pdf">http://www.nhs.uk/news/2009/04April/Documents/Swine%20Flu%20Leaflet_Web%20Version.pdf</a></p> <p>Hard copies of this leaflet are available from the Engagement and Communications team at NHS Berkshire West on 0118 982 2942.</p>
<b>Q 2</b>	<b>Why do I need a flu friend / what is their role?</b>
<b>A</b>	<p>Although rising, the number of cases of swine flu in Britain is relatively small and the symptoms mild at the moment. However, the British Government and World Health Organisation are taking the H1N1 virus seriously. From history, it's known that there could be a stronger, more widespread second wave of the pandemic, possibly in the winter. So it is wise to be prepared.</p>

	Flu friends could collect medicines, food and other essential supplies for you if you are ill. It is important that you do not do this yourself and stay at home as you may pass the flu virus to others.
<b>Q 3</b>	<b>When do I need to get a flu friend?</b>
<b>A</b>	<b>Now</b> is the time to identify a network of flu friends. There is no way of telling who will catch the flu, so it is important to be aware and to plan ahead.
<b>Q 4</b>	<b>How many flu friends do I need?</b>
<b>A</b>	It is a good idea to identify up to five flu friends, but identifying at least one is very important.
<b>Q 5</b>	<b>Who could be my flu friend?</b>
<b>A</b>	Neighbours, friends, and relatives who live near to you, who could easily collect your antiviral medication for you and who you would be happy to share your personal health details with.  In addition, you could consider becoming a 'flu friend' to a vulnerable person, such as the elderly or others who may live alone, in your area.
<b>Q 6</b>	<b>What happens if I cannot identify a flu friend?</b>
<b>A</b>	Some local groups are setting up flu friend networks. If you do not have a flu friend, consider making contact with these organisations in your area: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Your town or parish councils</li> <li>• Local churches and other places of worship</li> <li>• Local community groups</li> <li>• Call your local council to be put in contact with these groups</li> </ul> <p>In rural areas, please contact your parish council in the first instance. In other areas, a first point of contact could be your town or district council.</p>
<b>Q 7</b>	<b>What happens if my flu friend is ill?</b>
<b>A</b>	If your flu friend is ill then they cannot help you. For this reason, it is important to have more than one flu friend.

<b>Q 8</b>	<b>Can my child / children be my flu friend?</b>
<b>A</b>	You need to choose flu friends who can collect your antiviral medication. This may mean that a car, bus or other journey would be necessary. So only children who are able to make such a journey safely can be flu friends.
<b>Q 9</b>	<b>If my flu friend comes into contact with me when they collect my identification (ID) or when they deliver my medications or other items, are they at risk of catching flu from me?</b>
<b>A</b>	<p>There is a small risk that we will catch flu from sick people by being a 'flu friend'. This can be reduced by keeping at arms length and remember to wash your hands (this is important for the flu patient and the flu friend), remember the Catch it, Bin it, Kill it messages.</p> <p>(The flu virus lives for about 24 hours on un-wiped hard surfaces and 15 minutes on soft furnishings).</p>
<b>Q 10</b>	<b>What type /forms of ID do I need to give my flu friend and what type of ID do I need to be a flu friend?</b>
<b>A</b>	<p>Suitable ID includes any one of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Passport</li> <li>• Full driving licence</li> <li>• Paid utility bill (not less than 6 months)</li> <li>• Building society / national savings book</li> <li>• Cheque guarantee / credit card/debit card</li> <li>• Cheque book</li> <li>• Credit card statement (not older than 6 months)</li> <li>• Council tax payment book</li> <li>• Birth / marriage certificate</li> <li>• Military ID</li> <li>• Trade Union card</li> <li>• Standard Acknowledgment letter (SLA) issued by Home Office for Asylum seekers</li> <li>• Child benefit letter</li> <li>• Parent held record (red book)</li> <li>• NHS card</li> <li>• Healthcare professional registration number and ID</li> <li>• Pension/benefit book</li> </ul>
<b>Q 11</b>	<b>Does a flu friend need identification (ID)?</b>

<b>A</b>	Yes – the flu friend will need one item of identification (see Q 10).
<b>Q 12</b>	<b>Why does a flu friend need identification?</b>
<b>A</b>	A flu friend will need identification to collect your medicine on your behalf to ensure that you get your medicine. The identification they will need is listed in Q10.
<b>Q 13</b>	<b>Do I need to pass any information to people about my flu friend?</b>
<b>A</b>	Yes – you will need their first and last name in order to collect antiviral medication from a pharmacy (antiviral collection point when open in the future) on their behalf.  (If more people need treating with antiviral medication for flu then NHS Berkshire West will open a number of places in the Newbury, Reading and Wokingham area which will be known as Antiviral Collection Points (ACP). In Berkshire West, we will be complementing these ACPs with a number of pharmacies which will be Collection points only.
<b>Q 14</b>	<b>If my flu friend collects my prescription do they need to pay for it?</b>
<b>A</b>	No, the antiviral medicine to treat those suffering with influenza A H1N1 (swine flu) is free.
<b>Q 15</b>	<b>How will my flu friend know where to collect my prescription?</b>
<b>A</b>	If you are confirmed as suffering from swine flu (influenza A H1N1 virus), you and your flu friend will be given the details of the pharmacy_or Antiviral Collection Point which is where the flu friend will need to collect the antiviral medication.
<b>Q 16</b>	<b>What should I do now?</b>
<b>A</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identify your 'flu friends' and check that they are happy to help you.</li> <li>2. Complete the flu friend form <b>now</b> and keep it in a safe place e.g. on the fridge or by the phone. The form is available at <a href="http://www.berkshirewest-pct.nhs.uk/page_sa.asp?fldKey=129">http://www.berkshirewest-pct.nhs.uk/page_sa.asp?fldKey=129</a> Make sure you know where your own ID is located in case your flu friend needs to collect medicines for you.</li> <li>3. Think about neighbours who may live alone or family members that might need help and offer to be their 'flu friend'</li> </ol>

## Useful sources of information

**If you think you may have flu, please stay at home and phone NHS Direct or your GP for advice. Please do not go to your GP practice or hospital A & E department.**

**NHS Direct:** 0845 46 47

### **NHS Choices**

<http://www.nhs.uk/AlertsEmergencies/Pages/Pandemicflualert.aspx>

Read the latest official advice and find out about the simple steps you can take to help protect yourself and others.

You can access the following useful information:

- flu symptom checker
- swine flu Q & A
- flu virus latest
- information about swine flu

**Flu Hotline** – this is a pre-recorded information and advice line **0800 151 3513**

**NHS Berkshire West website:** [www.berkshirewest-pct.nhs.uk](http://www.berkshirewest-pct.nhs.uk)

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