



Providing support to parents during a swine flu pandemic

**A Guide for volunteers,
specialist workers and
home based staff**

28 July 2009

Core principles

- NCT provides essential services for parents and we wish to continue to do so at this time
- NCT services must be able to provide services for parents that do not increase risk of exposure of parents, babies, specialist workers or volunteers to H1N1 influenza

Top tips for volunteers, specialist workers and home based staff

- Keep yourself and your family well by following the hygiene advice from the government
- If you are a specialist worker or event organizer sort out a back up/alternate for yourself in the event of your being unable to run the class or event
- Set up egroups open to all parents and make links to them from your branch page on the web so parents excluded from events by reason of infection can stay in touch
- Consider more but smaller events
- Meet over the phone with a conference call
- Refer people to NCT phone lines.
<http://www.nct.org.uk/info-centre/getting-help/helplines>
- Refer people to NCT website www.nct.org.uk and the Q and A section
<http://www.nct.org.uk/info-centre/getting-help>

How does swine flu affect NCT service users?

H1N1 influenza - Swine flu, is now spreading quite rapidly across the world and has been classified as a pandemic. However swine flu seems to be much milder than the flu the government had in mind when it did its planning work for the UK. At present swine flu seems to be a mild disease for healthy people.

Although there is not much evidence-based information about this, it is generally thought that pregnant women – especially those in the third trimester (weeks 28-40) of pregnancy - are more susceptible to any infection, including swine flu, than other women of reproductive age. There is evidence that for them the infection is likely to be longer lasting and slightly more severe. During pregnancy women's immune systems are slightly suppressed to help them cope with carrying a baby, without an immune response.

The pandemic may go on for many months and possibly even years, until all those people who are going to catch it have had the disease and become immune or been vaccinated.

The key thing is that swine flu is a new variant of flu and because of this people do not have immunity to it so it will spread rapidly. We of course live in a world of many infections both bacterial and viral. Seasonal flu is with us every year and infections like chicken pox are ever-present in the community. NCT events go on all the time and because we are who we are, we deal with the situation of an infected volunteer, worker or attendee all the time. Swine flu is really no different it is just happening all at once. In order to prevent many people being sick at once and disrupting normal services and to reduce the chance of a pregnant woman catching this it is worth taking some extra care with swine flu.

Hand washing and using a tissue when people cough or sneeze, and then throwing it away, are believed to be the most effective way to slow the spread of infection and reduce your own risk of infection. This is true of swine flu and most other infections.

Once symptoms have subsided the person is no longer infectious.

What is the government advising?

The most up to date information from the government is here:

http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publichealth/Flu/Swineflu/DH_103068

But generally the Department of Health advise that families can continue with normal social activities.

What should NCT services do?

Deciding how you are going to continue to support parents is best done within your branch or PSA.

Although probably 30-40% of us are going to catch swine flu it is likely that those expecting a baby would prefer to catch it after their baby is born.

Those with a young baby would probably prefer to defer catching the virus. They may be looking to a vaccine to prevent them catching it at all.

Therefore we can help by doing our best to make sure we do not directly expose pregnant women and those with babies to swine flu at our events. We can also help reduce indirect exposure by good hygiene.

However pregnancy and caring for a young child can be a frightening and lonely time and we should organise ourselves to make sure we can keep the service going.

Enabling people to meet face to face is very valuable indeed but you may want to add other non face to face services as well to keep the support there for parents.

Ideas can be shared across the NCT online at:

PSAs	http://groups.yahoo.com/group/NCT-PSAs/
Branch chair	http://groups.yahoo.com/group/NCT_chairs/
Specialist workers	http://groups.yahoo.com/group/NCT-SWF/
Announce	http://groups.yahoo.com/group/nct_announce/
NCT main open group	http://groups.yahoo.com/group/nct/
PN SupportCoordinator	http://groups.yahoo.com/group/NCT_Postnatal_Supporter_group/

Providing information to parents and parents-to-be

For up to date information and advice NCT volunteers and workers should direct people to:

http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publichealth/Flu/Swineflu/DH_103068 for Government advice on pregnancy

http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Healthcare/Children/Maternity/Maternalandinfantnutrition/DH_099965 for advice on babies

<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Pandemic-flu/Pages/QA.aspx#Specialrisks> for NHS advice

<http://www.nct.org.uk/info-centre/information/view-117> for NCT information

NCT workers and volunteers must not offer advice on swine flu. They can direct people to advice from official bodies or the information which is on our website.

Providing face- to face support for parents and parents-to-be

NCT workers and volunteers should take precautions to reduce the risk of inadvertent transmission of the virus to parents and parents-to-be.

Hand washing and tissue use are believed to be the most effective way to prevent viral spread. Washing your hands on leaving home to go to the event and/or washing hands (or using a wipe such as a baby wipe) on arrival are likely to be helpful in preventing transmission. Please set a good example by using tissues when coughing and sneezing.

An asymptomatic individual who has not had prolonged direct close contact with a person with swine flu, and who is following the guidance from the government, should not pose an undue risk to pregnant women as a co-attende or organizer of an NCT event. So, most NCT classes and groups can continue as normal and we will keep a watching eye on the situation. This guidance and information to parents will be updated accordingly.

Without NCT activities the risk of isolation and lack of support and information for parents and parents-to-be would be considerable.

The maternity services will come under considerable pressure, particularly in September when the numbers of births reach an annual peak, so we will be needed more than ever.

What to do if you are running or involved in events (Branch events, courses of classes and study days or tutorials):

If a specialist worker, volunteer, tutor or PSA is running or involved in an event to be attended by pregnant women or new parents, they must not attend the event if infected.

If a specialist worker, volunteer, tutor or PSA, is running or involved in an event for pregnant women or new parents, is the carer for a close family member who has fallen sick with swine flu they should not attend the event. Those running the event should identify an alternate to provide cover for them and should have access to contact details for those scheduled to attend the event. Branch webpages and egroups should be utilized to inform participants of any cancellations.

Events for parents should not be run in the homes of those who have a swine flu infected person in them. Once the infected person is better and 7 days has passed with no other family member falling ill events can be run so long as hard surfaces such as door handles touched by visitors have been cleaned (soapy water is believed to be effective).

If a specialist worker, volunteer, tutor or PSA has been in contact with a swine flu infected person indirectly they may attend the event so long as they are observing good hand hygiene. Brief direct contact with someone who comes down with swine flu is also not likely to be a problem so long as regular hand washing is being carried out.

Those who use our services who are infected with swine flu should be asked to stay at home if they are ill. If someone obviously ill with swine flu symptoms, arrives at a session they should be asked to go home for their own sake and others. Those at home with swine flu have the added problem of being isolated and have the normal worries of being pregnant or a new parent so may need phone or email contact from others to make sure they are OK.

The NCT is open to all and we have some parents and some with babies and children with serious underlying health problems such as heart disease attending events and receiving support. These are the most vulnerable members of the population if they catch any infection including swine flu. They will be aware themselves of the issue. The care we are taking should make them feel welcome and safer with us. They might find it helpful to know what we are doing to reduce the risk of infection for them and everyone else.

How will we continue to support workers and volunteers to support parents?

We will be monitoring the situation and advice and updating parent information and this guidance accordingly. This will then be posted on update online and information for parents will be posted on the main website.

For news and updates sign up to NCT announce and make sure we have your email address so you receive eupdate.

The NCT has the most imaginative and committed volunteers and workers so please do share your innovative ideas for making sure we continue to support parents. If you need UK office help for anything email enquiries@nct.org.uk