

## Contingency Care Plan for Pandemic Occurrences

This document is designed to present a policy and contingency plan for AEGIS Guardianship Organisations in response to any boarding students in their care being affected by exposure to any of the above whilst in the UK. Included in such incidences could be a reoccurrence of the H1N1 Virus of Swine Flu, or serious influenza outbreaks. The contingency plan is designed to give a suggested solution to a potential problem; to set out and explain the limitations of AEGIS and to reassure member schools that there is a contingency plan in place to ensure the ongoing care and best practise for students whilst in the care of an AEGIS accredited Guardianship Organisation.

Pandemics can occur with little warning and whereas an agreement and understanding of responsibilities of schools and guardianship organisations has been established for many years, the situation caused by the Swine Flu pandemic showed that all parties face new problems and their solutions from time to time. This document discusses the following potential situations :

### *Term Time*

- + the possibility of a student(s) contracting a pandemic-type virus whilst at school where that school remains open
- + a school closing due to a pandemic type situation

### *Holiday Time*

- + a student(s) contracting a pandemic-type virus shortly before exeat, half term or a main holiday period giving rise to the need for care due to a restriction or prohibition to travel
- + a student contracting a pandemic-type virus whilst in the host family

### *Term Time – contracting a pandemic type virus in school during term time and the school remaining open*

Research shows that the majority of schools have a contingency plan to care for any overseas boarding student in their school who may contract a pandemic-type virus during term time whilst the school remains open. Whilst preferring such a student to go home and be cared for by parents/educational guardian if well enough to travel, never-the-less they do not insist on the student being removed when contagious and unwell – and indeed recognise this is not always possible. In consultation with these schools, the Department of Health and the BSA we believe this policy to be correct, realistic and in line with the National Minimum boarding standards\*.

However, there are some schools who state in their guidelines that should an overseas student contract a contagious or infectious illness then they expect the parents/educational guardian to remove that student immediately with no apparent flexibility or understanding that this may not be feasible and could contravene the advice given by the Department of Health at that time.

Whilst respecting that schools have the right to publish their individual policies relating to a pandemic situation, AEGIS wishes to clarify that guardianship organisations may not always be able to fulfil such policy requirements.

Part of a guardianship organisation's responsibility is to provide a safe environment for a student to stay during exeats, half terms, some longer holidays or when students arrive early or depart late at the beginning and end of terms: also on the occasion where a student is suspended or expelled. It is widely known that host families are contracted by guardianship organisations to fulfil this role. However, their care services are not enforceable and it is not in the contract between a guardianship organisation and host family that the latter should take in a student who is contagious – and indeed in many cases it would not be fair to ask them to do so. Having consulted with guardianship organisations, it appears that some do have a small number of families who would be able to help in the case of a pandemic – but these are very much in the minority and any decision would be dependent on the situation at the time. It would be considered wrong to ask a host family with underlying health issues, young children or elderly relatives to take a student in such a situation.

Host families are the main standard source of accommodation for students cared for by AEGIS accredited guardianship organisations. AEGIS and the guardianship organisations do not have medical facilities or isolation units – and nor does the NHS provide facilities for the general public. It is therefore clear that a guardianship organisation may not be able to arrange accommodation for a student who has contracted a pandemic type virus and remove them immediately from school.

Experience to date shows that the general attitude of overseas parents is that they would expect a school to take care of their child should he/she fall ill during term time. In some cases a guardianship organisation has been asked by parents not to remove a sick child from school. As a contract exists between the guardianship organisation and the parent, therefore a child cannot be removed from school without parental permission. A signed authority or medical release would be required from the parent in the case of such a withdrawal from school to protect the guardianship organisations' liability should the student become seriously ill or worse.

In summary, it is therefore understood that should a guardianship organisation be asked by school to rehouse a sick student if well enough to travel and having parental permission, then the guardianship organisation should try and accommodate the request. However schools must accept that if the guardianship organisation is unable to carry out the request then the school must care for the student on school premises.

#### *Where a school closes during Term Time due to a pandemic outbreak*

It is accepted that if a school closes, the guardianship organisation will collect any healthy child and accommodate them in the normal way.

Guardianship organisations accept that any students suffering from a pandemic outbreak are their responsibility when the school is closed. However, if they are unable to place them in a host family, a contingency plan to take them under their care will become effective. Schools are asked to understand that parental permission and medical advice will be required by the guardianship organisation before students are moved if they are unwell so as not to put the child's health at risk nor jeopardise any agreement with the parents.

#### *Holiday Time*

Guardianship organisations accept that any students contracting a pandemic type virus who cannot travel home or go to a host family during exeats/half terms/ longer holidays, are their responsibility.

They also accept that should a student fall ill whilst at a host family they are under the care of the guardianship organisation and remain so until the student is well enough to return to school even if this extends beyond the holiday period into term time.

In summary, AEGIS accredited guardianship organisations wish to reassure schools that if a school closes and students are unable to travel, an emergency contingency plan will be in place to enable the guardianship organisation to take the student under their care until such time that they are fit enough to either return back home or to school.

AEGIS accredited guardianship organisations would like schools to take these term time limitations into account and ask them to accept responsibility for the care of their students at such times.

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