

# Standard operating procedure

**Procedure:** Avian Influenza

**Number:** V0.7

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## Procedure overview

This operating procedure describes the NHS Cornwall and Isles of Scilly ICS process for dealing with suspected cases of avian influenza.

This Avian Influenza SOP document is the updated process for 2024 - 2025.

## Other (reference documentation)

[Influenza: treatment and prophylaxis using anti-viral agents - GOV.UK](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/bird-flu/)

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/bird-flu/>

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1045368/Avian influenza guidance and algorithms for managing incidents in birds.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1045368/Avian_influenza_guidance_and_algorithms_for_managing_incidents_in_birds.pdf)

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1069224/Avian Flu algorithm E 120422 1.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1069224/Avian_Flu_algorithm_E_120422_1.pdf)

[Search HSE website](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/avian-influenza-guidance-data-and-analysis)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/avian-influenza-guidance-data-and-analysis>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/avian-influenza-pre-and-post-exposure-prophylaxis-pgd-template>

Sample Service Spec – on request [Fiona.neely@phe.gov.uk](mailto:Fiona.neely@phe.gov.uk)

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/759277/AI guidance for HPT 2018 AT26112018.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/759277/AI_guidance_for_HPT_2018_AT26112018.pdf)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/avian-influenza-guidance-data-and-analysis>

[Health and Safety Executive advice on protecting workers from avian influenza.](#)

[NHS website](#)

## Requirements

The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) notes that avian influenza is primarily a disease of birds and the risk to the general public's health is very low. The regional UKHSA Health Protection Teams work closely with Department for the Environment and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) to monitor the situation UKHSA will provide health advice to persons who have encountered infected birds, as a precaution.

The Food Standards Agency has said that based on the current scientific evidence, avian influenza poses a very low food safety risk for UK consumers. Properly cooked poultry and poultry products, including eggs, are safe to eat.

The procedures are separated by flu season and in or out of hours.

It has been agreed with the Local Pharmaceutical Committee (LPC)<sup>1</sup> that all pharmacies in Cornwall and Isles of Scilly can stock the appropriate anti-virals. A

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<sup>1</sup> [About LPCs - Community Pharmacy England](#)

claiming process and fees have been agreed with the Medicines Optimisation team at NHS Cornwall and Isles of Scilly ICB.

If a Patient Specific Direction (PSD) is to be issued (out of season) then a prescriber is needed to complete it. They must then contact the community pharmacy to ensure that they are aware and do not turn the individual away and are dispensing the anti-viral. *(This arrangement may not be familiar to all pharmacies as was new in 2023, therefore it may be the first time many will have seen a PSD).* If you need a copy of the PSD template, you can obtain one from the ICB Medicines Optimisation team [CIOSICB.prescribing@nhs.net](mailto:CIOSICB.prescribing@nhs.net)

Further information can be found on [PharmOutcomes](#).

## Procedure

Changes of post-exposure recommendations for exposed contacts routinely working on Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) managed infected premises or APHA commissioned collection of wild birds including antiviral prophylaxis will no longer be recommended for exposed people working on infected premises or collecting wild birds when fully compliant with Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), including fit tested Respiratory Protective Equipment (RPE) in line with Health and Safety Executive (HSE) guidance, unless there is a breach in PPE compliance. Secondly, where full compliance with PPE is in place, exposed contacts will be under passive, not active follow up. Exposed contacts should inform the relevant Health Protection Team (HPT) if they develop symptoms, along with their employer and occupational health provider.

Where either a designated bird collector or a member of the public, who has handled dead or sick birds, becomes symptomatic and contacts a healthcare facility, they should be advised to call 111 as per the patient swabbing pathway - See appendix 1.

For 111 question set relating to the investigation and management of possible human cases of avian influenza amongst contacts associated with avian influenza incidents – See appendix 2.

For activation of swabbing - See appendix 3.

The HPT advises on specific packaging and transport for the samples to go to the Bristol public health lab for full respiratory virus panel testing (as opposed to the Pillar 2 covid labs) – See appendix 4.

The UKHSA Centre HPT follows its existing procedures for reporting, follow-up, and closure of the localised outbreak.

If any exposed person develops symptoms while on antiviral prophylaxis, this should be reported to the same out of hours clinician or the patient's GP. If the clinician then suspects avian influenza, they should recommend the exposed person is switched to a course of treatment dose anti-virals.

If further anti-virals are needed for this purpose for the exposed person, then this will require a further FP10 ('In Hours/In Season') or Patient Specific Direction PSD ('Out of Hours/Out of Season'). This should also be reported by the clinician to the UKHSA Centre HPT.

- Patient specific direction (PSD) template.  
[PSD for Antivirals Template 2022 v0.4.docx](#)

## Supply of antivirals

Community Pharmacy is the preferred option. *"if the community pharmacy has insufficient stock and cannot obtain a supply via their usual mechanism within 48 hours, and emergency order may be placed provided that this will arrive within the 48-hour window"*

As a last resort an acute hospital pharmacy (RCHT/UHP) can dispense making use of the UKHSA stock they hold. The charge for this will be processed by the NHS Cornwall and Isles of Scilly ICB Medicines Optimisation Team after the event has occurred.

Under exceptional circumstances, out of pocket expenses, such as wholesaler emergency order fees, or delivery cost where a pharmacy is directed to make a delivery, may be claimed by the pharmacy. Claims are made via the ICB medicines optimisation team.

## Command and Control

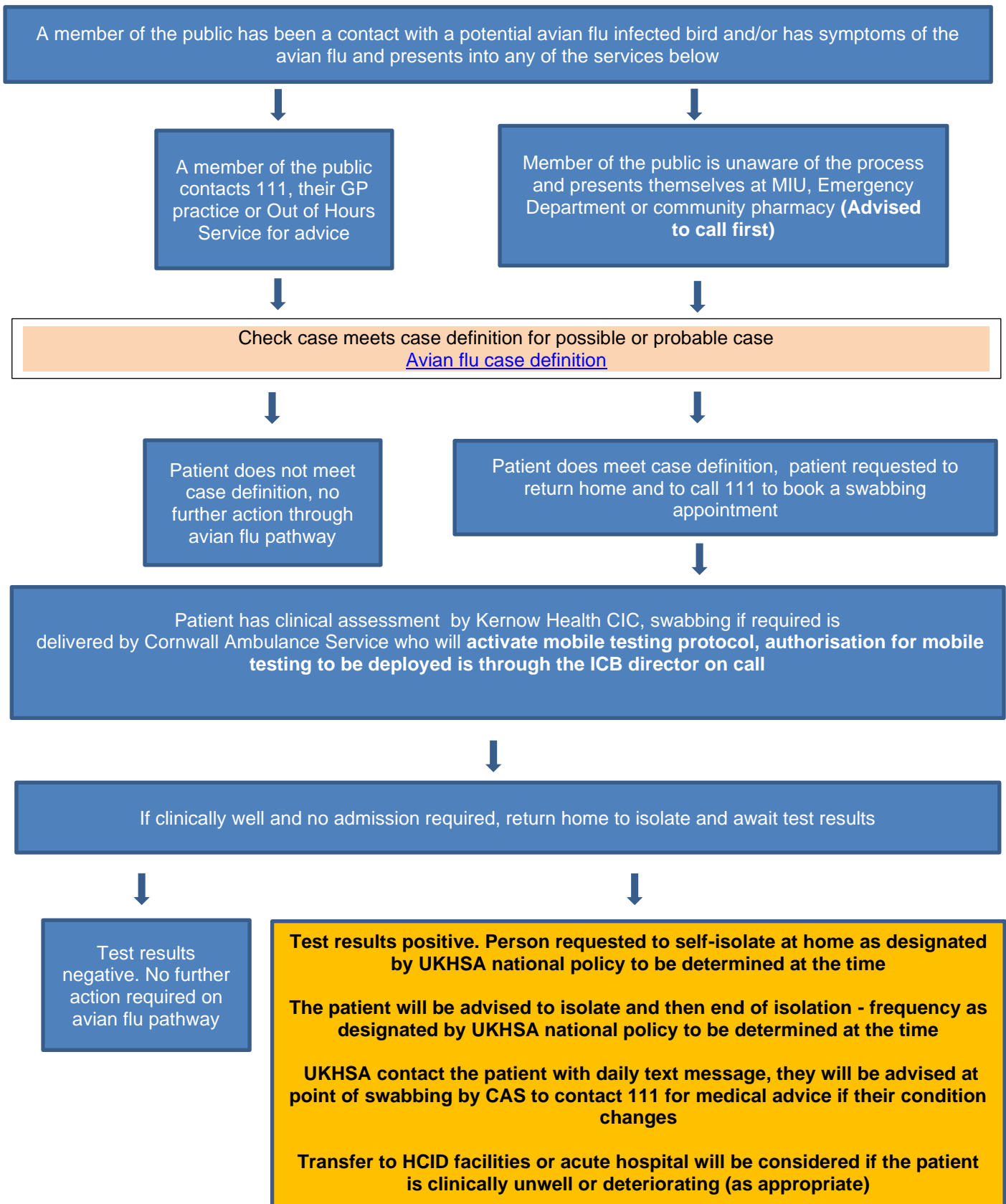
The role of the ICB EPRR team will be to advise or co-ordinate anything requiring a strategic decision.

The delivery/operational aspects will be undertaken as follows:

- CfT will be responsible for Tactical co-ordination on the Isles of Scilly.
- Kernow Health CIC/111 for clinical assessment and swabbing activation.
- Cornwall Ambulance Service (CAS) for swabbing.

## Appendix 1

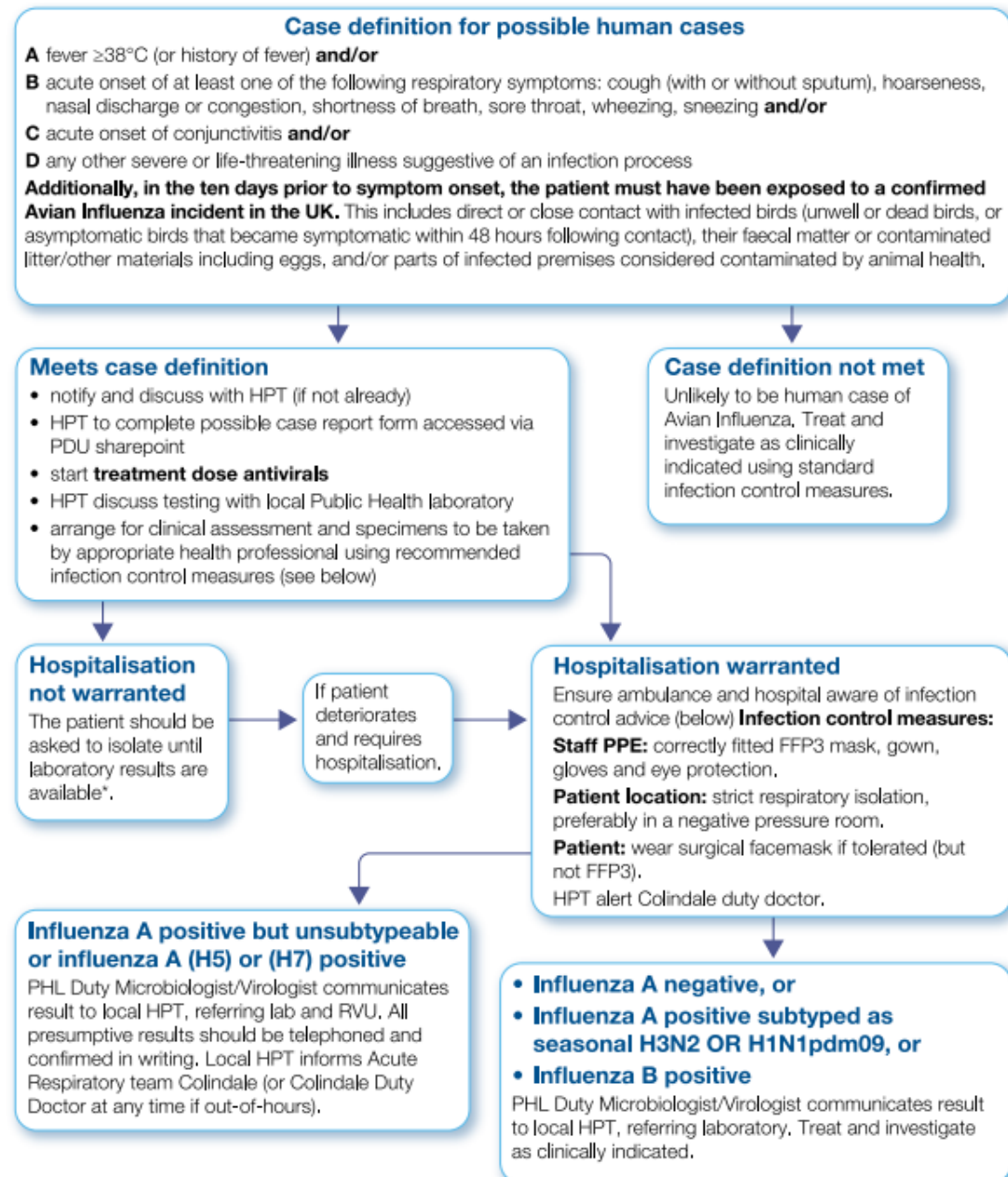
### Cornwall and Isles of Scilly avian flu patient testing pathway



## Appendix 2



### Investigation and management of possible human cases of avian influenza amongst contacts associated with avian influenza incidents



\*Isolation for asymptomatic contacts is not recommended routinely prior to laboratory results being available.

Avian influenza guidance: [www.gov.uk/government/collections/avian-influenza-guidance-data-and-analysis](http://www.gov.uk/government/collections/avian-influenza-guidance-data-and-analysis)  
Local public health laboratories: [www.gov.uk/government/collections/public-health-laboratories](http://www.gov.uk/government/collections/public-health-laboratories)

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## Appendix 3

Action card	Avian FLU OUTBREAK In hours (for patient swabbing)
1	<p>This agreement describes the procedures and processes that will be followed within NHS Cornwall and Isles of Scilly ICS to manage any incident that requires the implementation of special arrangements by the system to manage an outbreak of Avian Flu.</p> <p>This plan should be used with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NHS Cornwall and Isles of Scilly ICB System Incident Response Plan</li> <li>• Animal Health Plan (DCIoS LRF) 14/03/2019 and</li> <li>• Contingency plan exotic notifiable diseases of animals in England (DEFRA) 05/11/2019</li> </ul> <p><a href="https://collaborate.resilience.gov.uk/RDService/home/8680/Animal-disease-plans">https://collaborate.resilience.gov.uk/RDService/home/8680/Animal-disease-plans</a></p> <p><a href="https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/798411/Managing-the-human-health-implications-of-avian-influenza-guidance-for-health-protection-teams.pdf">Managing the human health implications of avian influenza - guidance for health protection teams (publishing.service.gov.uk)</a></p> <p><a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/news/reminders-for-health-professionals-on-recognising-possible-human-cases-of-avian-influenza-and-accessing-testing">Reminder for health professionals on recognising possible human cases of Avian Influenza and accessing testing - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)</a></p> <p>NOTE: Key changes in the interim H5N1 guidance 202305) are:</p> <p>Introduction of a probable' case definition for birds. This is for situations where a person has exposure to a dead wild bird and where the bird will not be tested for avian influenza by APHA. Once Avian Influenza is identified in a surveillance species, there is no further testing within 3km for 14 days. Previously, the Avian Influenza guidance did not cover circumstances where wild birds may have died from avian influenza but would not be tested by APHA. There will be no further notifications of potential cases either.</p> <p>Notifications of possible outbreaks may be received from the Council of the Isles of Scilly and Cornwall Council; APHA, DEFRA, UKHSA.</p>
	<b>In Hours Only – On site swabbing (7 days a week 9am – 5pm)</b>
2	<p><b>Cornwall</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Notification received via telephone from UKHSA or Public Health to the dispatch lead at Kernow Health CIC – 07731 998755 (or 01872 224042 if mobile not answered) of outbreak of avian flu and requirement to swab symptomatic staff at site.</li> <li>• NHS Cornwall and Isles of Scilly ICB Director on Call receives a call from Kernow Health CIC, via Bodmin switchboard (01208 251300), with a request to activate Cornwall Ambulance Service (CAS) to site to undertake mass swabbing at scene.</li> <li>• They will provide details given by UKHSA (including HPZ number).</li> </ul>

- The Director on Call agrees the activation of CAS mobile testing unit to collect swabs from notified individuals. (Please ensure that CAS is given the HPZ number as needs to go on the microbiology form).
- CAS/Kernow Health CIC to liaise with point of contact for affected people to arrange an appointment time for staff requiring swabbing.
- Staff to be deployed to the site with all equipment to obtain swabs. The swabber to be in full PPE inc. fit tested FFP3 masks and eye protection.
- 2X 5 sets of swabs suitable for avian flu, including packaging will be held (1 set each) on the Isles of Scilly and at Kernow Health CIC, complete with a sheet of instructions on use.
- The swabbing process is the same as for COVID-19 – i.e., nose and throat swab, but there may also be a requirement for conjunctival swabbing. The swabs can be returned via a priority post box or via a courier (arranged by the HPT).
- Working with the UKHSA, CAS will ensure that all swabs carry the relevant HPZ reference and have the bio secure avian influenza packaging. Microbiology will advise on kits and where they can be sourced from. Further kits can be accessed via the HPT at the time of an incident (via courier).
- The clinician taking the swab will need to contact UKHSA in or out-of-hours on 0300 303 8162.
- Should 10 or more people require swabbing in a short time CAS and ICB to review the trigger for setting up a mobile drive through swabbing site.

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### **Isles of Scilly**

The GP practice on the islands issue prescriptions for either pre or post exposure antivirals. The local pharmacy holds a small stock and can order more via the wholesale supplier. (They are not currently commissioned nor expected to hold stock of antivirals). Out of season this will be a PSD. (If a PSD is issued the GP MUST contact the pharmacy to advise).

If mobile swabbing is required, the following process should be followed:

- Notification received via telephone from UKHSA, Public Health or the Council of Isles of Scilly to the dispatch lead at Kernow Health CIC – 07731 998755 (or 01872 224042 if mobile not answered) of outbreak of avian flu and requirement to swab symptomatic staff at site.
- Kernow Health CIC to ascertain whether the GP practice on the islands has been contacted and is able to prescribe (where the issue of pre-emptive antivirals are deemed appropriate). Kernow Health CIC to call the NHS Cornwall and Isles of Scilly ICB Director on Call for authorisation to activation CAS.



- NHS Cornwall and Isles of Scilly ICB Director on Call receives a call from Kernow Health CIC, via Bodmin switchboard (01208 251300), with a request to activate Cornwall Ambulance Service (CAS) to site to undertake mass swabbing at scene. CAS have agreed, in principle, that they will deploy to the islands if needed.
- The initiating requestor will provide the details given by UKHSA (including HPZ number).
- The Director on Call agrees the activation of CAS mobile testing unit to collect swabs from notified individuals. (Please ensure that CAS is given the HPZ number as needs to go on the microbiology form).
- CAS/Kernow Health CIC to liaise with point of contact for affected people to arrange an appointment time for staff requiring swabbing.
- Staff to be deployed to the site with all equipment to obtain swabs. The swabber to be in full PPE inc. fit tested FFP3 masks and eye protection.

#### **Swabbing protocol**

- Ideally TWO nose and throat swabs (just for clarity that means one swab used for nose and throat, then another swab used for taking another nose and throat sample). But if the clinician can only get one nose and throat sample, that would be acceptable
- Transport Packaging for UN 3373 Substances.
- Any packaging for biological substances must include three components:
  - A primary receptacle: the tube, vial or other container typically made of glass or rigid plastic (including the stopper, cap, or other closure elements) that is in direct contact with the specimen.
  - A secondary packaging (including cushioning and other materials) that fully encapsulates the primary receptacle.
  - An outer packaging for shipping or transit.
- Components must meet specific requirements, including being capable of passing specific test procedures based on receptacle or packaging type. In addition, compliance with the regulations is based, in part, on overall performance; so, there can be no substitutions of a component from one manufacturer with a similar – but untested – component from another manufacturer.
- The postal swab kits that are used by HPT and Public Health Laboratory (PHL) are compliant – 5 swabbing kits are pre-located at Kernow Health CIC and on the Isles of Scilly, in case of need. (Category B packaging).
- The PHL has agreed that if courier transport is required from Cornwall or Isles of Scilly to the lab, they would be willing to pay the costs.

Working with the UKHSA, CAS will ensure that all swabs carry the relevant HPZ reference and have the bio secure avian influenza packaging.

Further kits can be accessed via the HPT at the time of an incident (via courier).

	The clinician taking the swab will need to contact UKHSA in or out-of-hours on 0300 303 8162.
4	<p>The cost of activation has been agreed through Medicines Optimisation and the Director on Call should sanction the deployment, if requested.</p> <p><b>Activation will be between 9am and 5pm 7 days a week</b>, although calls seeking permission to activate may be received out of hours. Kernow Health CIC will complete and send the referral form and CAS will action the following morning.</p> <p>The current price on a page (for Cornwall) is to supply a qualified swab technician, all insurances, all PPE, and all clinical equipment required. This quote will also include mainland travel to and from the airport.</p> <p>For deployment to the Isles of Scilly there will be additional costs, as detailed below: Parking fees, return transport fees to the island, travel around the island, accommodation/subsistence (if required), and carriage costs/insurance of samples back to the mainland. In addition, in the event of bad weather, CAS would continue to claim the same day rate until the staff member can return to the mainland. These will all be included on the invoice from CAS sent to the ICB.</p>
5	Prescriptions will be made on either an FP10 or Patient Specific Directive (PSD).
6	<p><b>Community pharmacy should be the first choice for supply of medication.</b></p> <p>“The LPC has agreed that all community pharmacies within Cornwall and Isles of Scilly may carry the anti-virals and should be able to obtain supplies from their wholesaler on a next working day basis if required.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wholesaler emergency ordering is paid for by NHS Cornwall and Isles of Scilly ICB – submit claims to <a href="mailto:CIOSICB.prescribing@nhs.net">C IOSICB.prescribing@nhs.net</a></li> <li>The acute hospital holds a small stock of medication for dispatch in extremis, should stock not be available from the above in a timely manner.</li> </ul>
7	Pharmacies can make an emergency wholesale order for a fee, <b>which the On Call Director may be asked to approve</b> . Details of this should be sent to <a href="mailto:CIOSICB.prescribing@nhs.net">C IOSICB.prescribing@nhs.net</a>
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Out of Season a PSD must be used to obtain a supply from a community pharmacy. The charge for this will be processed by NHS Cornwall and Isles of Scilly ICB Medicines Optimisation Team after the event <a href="mailto:CIOSICB.prescribing@nhs.net">C IOSICB.prescribing@nhs.net</a> as will any activation fee for the stand up of CAS which should be sent to <a href="mailto:CIOSICB.EPRR@nhs.net">C IOSICB.EPRR@nhs.net</a></li> <li>The Director on call to ensure that they notify medicines optimisation and EPRR of the detail of the activation, by email ASAP after activation request granted. Please copy <a href="mailto:ciosicb.headofipc@nhs.net">ciosicb.headofipc@nhs.net</a> and <a href="mailto:louise.dickinson2@nhs.net">louise.dickinson2@nhs.net</a> into the email.</li> <li>The completed PSD should be sent to the organisation that will dispense it (such as a community pharmacy or a hospital pharmacy). Where circumstances mean that it will not arrive promptly an electronic copy can be used to give advance notice of the supplies required, but the signed original must also be sent.</li> </ul>

## Appendix 4

<b>COVID-19</b> <b>NHS Cornwall and Isles of Scilly ICS</b> <b>Swabbing Guide</b>	<b>Avian Influenza</b>
This card provides information on the process for swabbing for avian flu.	
<p><b>Assessment of people exposed to potential or confirmed disease:</b></p> <p>There may be an urgent need for people who have been exposed during a potential outbreak or incident, to be tested for infection.</p> <p>Responsibilities for single case or very low case numbers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clinical assessment will be undertaken via the Kernow Health CIC/111 service.</li> <li>• UKHSA may advise that swabbing (or other tests e.g. blood testing) of the affected individual be undertaken ASAP by an FFP3 Fit Mask trained personnel. Cornwall Ambulance Service (CAS) deliver this service.</li> <li>• The swabs are the same as those for covid19 - a viral transport medium swab BUT the tester must talk to the lab first and arrange a specific transport pack and to liaise with RCH in order that they can liaise with UKHSA lab, copying <a href="mailto:CIOSICB.EPRR@nhs.net">CIOSICB.EPRR@nhs.net</a> for information.</li> </ul> <p><b>Requirement for an of site (mobile) swab to be carried out:</b></p> <p>This will be organised via Kernow Health CIC who will, following approval from the NHS Cornwall and Isles of Scilly ICB director on call, will activate Cornwall Ambulance Service (CAS). There are 2 options, a mobile car or, if more than 10 the potential for a drive through arrangement to be set up. This can be done within each of the 3 ICA areas.</p> <p><b>Procedure for Conjunctival swabs:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Patients or staff, suspected of having avian flu, require conjunctival swabbing to assist with diagnosis. This is a clean procedure and should be carried out in accordance with organisational infection control guidelines.</li> <li>• The procedure must be carried out by a suitably trained, qualified individual.</li> <li>• The equipment required includes virology swab, plastic bag to transport the sample to pathology and appropriately filled in pathology request form.</li> <li>• Ensure the patient has not had fluorescein instilled in the eye prior to the procedure as this can affect the machines used for the investigations.</li> <li>• It is only necessary to swab one eye.</li> <li>• Check patient name, address, and date of birth with the patient.</li> <li>• Explain the procedure to the patient and the reason for the investigation, obtain verbal consent and reassure them. The procedure can be a little uncomfortable but can be performed reasonably quickly.</li> </ul>	

- The patient can sit or lie for the procedure depending on how they are most comfortable with their head supported by a head rest or pillow.
- Wash your hands and put on gloves (do not need to be sterile).
- Ask the patient to look up with their eyes (not their whole head).
- Pull down the lower lid to expose the conjunctiva of the lower fornix.
- Wipe the virology sample stick along the conjunctiva in the lower fornix – this does need to be quite firm and vigorous in order to obtain adequate sample matter. The swab can be used dry or moistened with sterile saline (this can be slightly more comfortable for the patient) it will not affect the sample.
- Remove the lid from the sample container, place the swab stick inside and snap the stick at the neck of the tube then replace the lid.
- Ask the patient to close their eyes after the procedure for a few minutes for comfort.
- Label the sample appropriately and place in the plastic bag with the request form.
- Remove gloves and wash hands.
- Ensure this is transported immediately to the lab to ensure the sample is fresh or place in the refrigerator if there will be a delay in this process.

**NOTE – OBTAINING SWABS FROM CHILDREN (\*excluding neonates)**

- When it is necessary to take a swab from a small child/baby it is important that the procedure is fully explained to the parents and that consent is obtained. Make sure the appropriate number of suitable staff is available for this procedure. If possible, ensure that the parents stay with the child or let them assist by holding the child on their lap and supporting their head. Or by swaddling on the bed, with the parent staying directly in the child's eye line. This will help to minimise fears and anxieties. They will need constant reassurance as the child usually cries a lot and parents often find this distressing.

**Procedure for respiratory swabs**

- The collection kit contains the following components:



- Place the Copan tube containing the swab into the hard transport container, retaining the absorbent material. Ensure sample pot is labelled with name, date of birth and date sample taken



- Place the hard transport container and the completed paper request form into the UN3373 transport box. Please complete the request form as clearly and fully as possible.

Please include:

1. Name, Date of Birth, Address of Patient and Name & postcode of Care Home or School etc.
2. HPZone number (HPT reference number).
3. Onset date of symptoms.
4. Any antibiotics taken.
5. Clinical details e.g. dry or productive cough, runny nose, pyrexia (temperature), worsening shortness of breath etc.
6. Date swab taken.



- Place the closed transport box into the pre-paid addressed envelope. Seal envelope and post to laboratory or hand to collection driver for delivery to laboratory. (Tester MUST contact the HPT prior to sending to a lab).
- The agreement within the Cornwall ICS of which providers can assist with FFP3 Fit Mask and screening is included within the Outbreak Management SOP, developed by Infection Control Nurses and Directors of Nursing.
- UKHSA can arrange for a courier to collect a locally sourced swab and deliver to the Public Health Laboratory (normally in Bristol) for assessment.
- Results will be confirmed ASAP and communicated to all partners.

#### Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

To clinically assess or swab a potentially infected individual, the following PPE requirement will vary according to the infection concerned:

Avian flu exposure requires the highest level of protection in the community:

- [FFP3 Fit test respiratory masks.](#)
- Gloves.
- Gown.
- Eye protection.