



## For Preventing Spread of Flu in the Workplace **GUIDANCE**

As cases of flu (including novel H1N1 flu) continue to rise, employers should be familiar with simple measures to reduce the risk of infection in the workplace and prepare for the impact of illness on operations. This guidance is intended for general workplace settings, such as offices, stores, and restaurants.

The recommendations below are based on the current flu conditions. If the flu situation becomes more severe than during Spring/Summer 2009, absenteeism will likely be far greater, and additional protective measures may be considered to slow the spread. For health information to distribute to employees or visitors, as well as timely information concerning flu (seasonal and novel H1N1), visit the websites of the Cook County Department of Public Health ([www.cookcountypublichealth.org](http://www.cookcountypublichealth.org)), U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ([www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)) or the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services ([www.flu.gov](http://www.flu.gov)).

### **Support sick persons to stay home**

- Advise employees to know signs and symptoms of flu and what they should do when they or a family member is sick. If ill, employees should stay home and notify their manager.
  - Symptoms include a fever (100°F or higher) and any other signs such as cough, sore throat, runny/stuffy nose, chills, body aches, headaches, or fatigue.
  - Persons with flu symptoms should remain at home until fever free without the use of fever-reducing medications for at least 24 hours.
  - Employees who have an ill family member at home with influenza can go to work as usual. These employees should monitor their health every day.
- Ensure sick leave policies are flexible and consistent with public health guidance and that employees are informed of these policies. Consider policies that permit employees to stay home to care for an ill family member. Be aware employees may need to stay at home to care for sick family members more than usual.
- Talk with companies that provide your workplace with contract/temporary workers about the importance of sick workers staying home. Encourage them to develop non-punitive leave policies.
- Do not require a doctor's note for workers who are ill with influenza-like illness to validate their illness or to return to work, as doctor's offices and medical facilities may be extremely busy and may not be able to provide such documentation in a timely way.
- Plan for sick employees to be out for ~ 3 – 5 days in most cases, even if antiviral medicines are used.

### **Ask sick employees at work to go home**

- Separate promptly any employee who appears to have flu-like illness upon arrival at work or becomes ill during the day from others at work. Advise him/her to go home until fever free without use of fever-reducing medications for at least 24 hours.
  - When possible, workers with flu-like illness should be given a surgical mask to wear before they go home if they cannot be placed in an area away from others. For more information, see Interim Recommendations for Facemask and Respirator Use to Reduce Novel Influenza A (H1N1) Virus Transmission at <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/masks.htm>.
- If an employee becomes ill at work, inform others of their possible exposure to flu-like illness while maintaining confidentiality as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Visit [Flu.gov](http://www.flu.gov) at [http://www.flu.gov/faq/workplace\\_questions/equal\\_employment/index.html#PrivacyIssues](http://www.flu.gov/faq/workplace_questions/equal_employment/index.html#PrivacyIssues) to learn more about privacy issues.
  - Employees exposed to a sick co-worker should monitor themselves for symptoms of influenza-like illness and stay home if they are sick.

**Cover Coughs and Sneezes**

One way that flu viruses can spread is from person to person through coughing or sneezing of a sick person.

- Place posters in the worksite that encourages employees or visitors to cover their cough or sneeze.
- Provide employee messages on the importance of covering coughs and sneezes with a tissue or, in the absence of a tissue, one's sleeve.
- Provide tissues and no-touch disposal receptacles for use by employees and visitors. Empty them regularly.

**Improve Hand Hygiene**

Another way that flu viruses may also be spread is by hands that are contaminated.

- Place posters in the worksite that encourages hand hygiene among employees or visitors.
- Instruct employees to wash their hands often with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand cleaner, especially after coughing or sneezing.
- Provide soap and water and alcohol-based hand sanitizers in the workplace. Ensure that adequate supplies are maintained. If feasible, place hand sanitizers in multiple locations or in conference rooms to encourage hand hygiene.

**Enforce Good Maintenance Practices**

- Train all cleaning staff on safe use of cleaning and disinfectant products. Provide staff with gloves to be worn when using cleaning products, handling potentially contaminated items (trash, tissues, etc.).
- Clean often all commonly touched surfaces in the workplace, such as workstations, countertops, doorknobs, handrails, and telephones. Use the cleaning agents that are usually used in these areas and follow the directions on the label. No additional disinfection beyond routine cleaning is recommended.
- Remind cleaning staff to wash their hands often with soap and water after using cleaning products or touching contaminated surfaces or items.
- Keep heating and ventilation systems in good working order in accordance with system specifications and any applicable regulations.

**Encourage Employees to Get Vaccinated**

- Encourage all employees to get a seasonal flu shot.
- Encourage employees to find out if they should get the novel H1N1 influenza vaccine when it becomes available. For information on groups prioritized for the novel H1N1 flu vaccine, please visit CDC website at <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/vaccination/acip.htm>.
- Offer opportunities at work for flu vaccination or consider granting employees time off from work to get vaccinated if not offered at the worksite.
- Review health benefits you offer employees and work with insurers to explore if they can cover the costs of influenza vaccination.

**Take Measures to Protect Employees Who are at High Risk for Severe Illness from Flu**

People at high risk for severe illness from flu: Children under 5; Pregnant women; Older adults over 65; People with diabetes, asthma (or other lung diseases), heart, liver or kidney diseases; Children under 18 on long term aspirin therapy; People with conditions that weaken their immune systems such as cancer or HIV.

- Advise employees to know if they are considered at high risk for severe illness from flu (seasonal or novel H1N1 flu).
- Encourage employees to get vaccinated (see above).
- Inform employees who become ill and are at high risk for severe illness from flu to promptly call a health care provider for advice. Early treatment with antiviral medications is very important for people at high risk because it can prevent hospitalizations and deaths.

**Advise Employees Before Traveling to Take Certain Steps**

- Recommend that employees check themselves for fever and any other signs of influenza-like illness before starting travel and notify their supervisor and stay home if they are ill.
- Advise employees about precautions they may need to take to protect their health.
- Inform employees who become ill *while travelling* and are at high risk for severe illness from flu to promptly call a health care provider for advice. Early treatment with antiviral medications is very important for people at high risk because it can prevent hospitalizations and deaths.
- Ensure employees who become ill while traveling or on temporary assignment understand who they should call (e.g., notify their supervisor) and how to obtain medical care. If outside the United States, ill employees should follow company's policy for obtaining medical care, or contact a health care provider or overseas medical assistance company to assist them with finding an appropriate health care provider in that country, if needed.

A U.S. consular officer can help locate health care services. However, U.S. embassies, consulates, and military facilities do not have the legal authority, capability, and resources to evacuate or give medications, vaccines, or medical care to private U.S. citizens overseas.

- Refer to CDC's Travel Website (<http://www.cdc.gov/travel/content/novel-h1n1-flu.aspx>).

**Prepare for Increased Numbers of Employee Absences Due to Illness in Employees and Their Family Members, and Plan Ways for Essential Business Functions to Continue**

- Plan to monitor and respond to absenteeism at the workplace. Implement plans to continue your essential functions in case absenteeism. Elevated absentee rates can be due to sick workers, those who need to care for others, or from workers with conditions that make them at higher risk for complications from influenza and who may be worried about coming to work.
- Cross-train personnel to perform essential functions.
- Assess your essential functions and the reliance that others and the community have on your services or products. Be prepared to change your business practices if needed to maintain critical operations (e.g. identify alternative suppliers, temporarily suspend some operations if needed).

**Prepare for Possible School Dismissal or Temporary Closure of Child Care Programs**

Although school dismissals or closures of child care programs are not likely to be generally recommended at this level of severity, they are possible in some jurisdictions.

- Be prepared to allow workers to stay home to care for children if schools are dismissed or child care programs are closed.
- Recommend strongly parents not bring their children with them to work while schools are dismissed.
- Ensure sick leave policies are flexible and non-punitive (see section, Support Sick Employees to Stay Home).
- Cross-train employees to cover essential functions.
- Read CDC's Guidance for State and Local Public Health Officials and School Administrators for School (K-12) Responses to better understand the conditions under which schools may be dismissed (<http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/schools/schoolguidance.htm>).

**Review Additional Flu and Novel H1N1 Resources for Businesses**

- Novel H1N1 Flu (Swine Flu): General Information  
[http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/general\\_info.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/general_info.htm)
- Preparing for the Flu: A Communication Toolkit for Businesses and Employers  
<http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/business/toolkit/>
- Occupational Health Issues Associated With H1N1 Influenza Virus (Swine Flu)  
<http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/h1n1flu/>