

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) about H1N1 Flu: Business

What is novel H1N1?

H1N1 flu is a respiratory disease, similar to the regular seasonal flu. It has commonly been called swine flu. It appears to be spreading fast in younger people, specifically 10-24 year olds. The severity of the disease varies from very mild symptoms to severe illness. While most people have recovered without needing medical treatment, hospitalizations and deaths from infection with this virus have occurred.

What are the signs and symptoms of H1N1?

Signs of H1N1 and seasonal flu are similar. Signs of flu include: fever, runny or stuffy nose, sore throat and cough, body aches, headache, chills, and fatigue. Some people with H1N1 flu have also reported nausea, vomiting and diarrhea.

What steps can employees take to stay healthy?

- Practice good hand hygiene. Wash hands with soap and water, especially if coughing or sneezing. Using alcohol-based cleaners is also helpful.
- Provide sufficient facilities for hand washing and alcohol-based hand sanitizers (or wipes) in common workplace areas such as lobbies, corridors, and restrooms. Encourage their frequent use.
- Practice good respiratory etiquette. Cover mouth and nose with a tissue. If a tissue isn't available, cough or sneeze into an elbow or shoulder, not into hands.
- Encourage sick people to stay home and self isolate. Expect sick employees to be out for about 3 to 5 days, even if antivirals are used.
- Encourage employees to get vaccinated against seasonal flu and the H1N1 flu. It is recommended that employees most at risk for complications, including pregnant women and people with chronic medical conditions, get the H1N1 vaccine.
- Consider social distancing practices. Allowing employees to work off-site or in alternative sites, using staggered starting times or increasing the distance between work stations could help reduce spread of the flu.

What other steps can employers take to prepare for the flu season?

- Review your current pandemic flu plan. This might include testing of key components or updating elements with H1N1 specific information. Share your plans with employees and clearly communicate expectations.
- Create flexible leave policies so sick employees and those who need to stay home to care for sick family members can do so. Be prepared for the effect school and childcare closures may have on absenteeism. Schools and childcare programs may close, particularly if the severity increases.
- Monitor absenteeism throughout the fall and winter. If these numbers are higher than during the average season, consider contacting your local health department.
- Identify essential employees, essential business functions, and other critical inputs (e.g. raw materials, suppliers, subcontractor services/products, and logistics) required to maintain business operations by location and function should there be disruptions during the pandemic H1N1 flu outbreak.
- Review interim recommendations for facemask and respirator use in non-health care settings.

What should employees do if they notice someone with flu-like illness?

- Ask employees to keep a six-foot distance from those who are sick.
- Encourage employees to return home and away from others until at least 24 hours after they no longer have a fever, without the use of fever-reducing medicines.
- Advise employees to check with their health care provider about any special care they might need related to pregnancy or chronic health conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, asthma or emphysema.
- Call for emergency medical services (911) if the ill person develops any emergency warning signs, including difficulty breathing, shortness of breath or chest pain, lips turn purple or blue, severe vomiting or are unable to keep liquids down, signs of dehydration, seizures, employee is less responsive than normal or becomes confused, or flu-like symptoms that improve but return with a fever and a worse cough.

What additional cleaning should be done?

It is important to continue regular cleaning schedules. Disinfecting items that are already cleaned is not recommended.

Will businesses be closed to slow the spread of H1N1?

Currently, business closure is not normally recommended. If a large number of flu-like illnesses occur, businesses should consult with state and local health officials about an appropriate response.

Is it safe for employees to use public transportation or travel?

- It is considered safe for the public to use public transportation. All riders should practice standard hygiene, like washing hands after riding, carrying tissues, or coughing into their own shoulder or elbow. Wearing a mask is not currently recommended.
- Employees who travel for business should consult the CDC travel guidance. Employees who are planning to travel but become sick with flu-like symptoms should stay home.
- Businesses should provide guidance to employees who may become sick while traveling. If an employee becomes sick while traveling, they should stay in their hotel room until they feel better except for times when they seek medical care.

Additional Resources

Twitter: Flu symptom update
<http://bit.ly/hvsaS>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Social media tools
<http://www.cdc.gov/SocialMedia/Campaigns/H1N1/>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Guidance for businesses
<http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/business/guidance/>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Travel guidelines
<http://wwwn.cdc.gov/travel/content/news-announcements/novel-h1n1-flu-travel.aspx>

Pandemic Flu: Business Checklists
<http://flu.gov/professional/business/businesschecklist.html>

For more information on Business Institutions and H1N1, call the City of Milwaukee Health Department at 414-286-3521.