



Guidance for Businesses and Employers

Plan and Response to the 2009 – 2010 Influenza Season

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Planning for fall and winter influenza season

In response to the anticipated spread of 2009 H1N1 influenza, the CDC has revised its recommendations to assist businesses and other employers of all sizes.

The severity of illness that 2009 H1N1 influenza flu will cause (including hospitalizations and deaths) or the amount of illness that may occur as a result of seasonal influenza during the 2009–2010 influenza season cannot be predicted with a high degree of certainty. Therefore, employers should plan to be able to respond in a flexible way to varying levels of severity and be prepared to refine their pandemic influenza response plans if a potentially more serious outbreak of influenza evolves during the fall and winter. More people and communities are likely to be affected as influenza is more widely transmitted. The CDC and its partners will continuously monitor national and international data on the severity of illness caused by influenza, will disseminate the results of these ongoing surveillance and will make additional recommendations as needed.

Preparedness and response recommendations

This guidance is designed to help employers plan for and respond to two possible conditions: 1) a continuation of the current level of severity of influenza as was observed during the spring and summer of 2009 and 2) a more severe outbreak. The first situation is what is being experienced in some communities now—an outbreak of similar severity of 2009 H1N1 to the spring. However, even if the severity of the virus does not change, planners should expect that there will be more people who are ill in the fall and winter as 2009 H1N1 outbreaks coincide with the seasonal influenza season, and this level of absenteeism may impact business operations. A second situation involves an outbreak of greater severity including more people with severe illness and thus, more people hospitalized for influenza complications; more deaths from influenza; and a probable escalation of absenteeism.

Businesses should have an understanding of their normal seasonal absenteeism rates and know how to monitor their personnel for any unusual increases in absenteeism through the fall and winter. Business continuity planners should assess their essential business functions now to determine at what threshold of absenteeism those functions would be threatened if absenteeism escalates. Planners can then prepare to take more aggressive measures to protect continuity as absenteeism escalates towards those thresholds.

Actions employers should take now

- Review or establish a flexible influenza pandemic plan and involve your employees in developing and reviewing your plan
- Conduct a focused discussion or exercise using your plan, to find out ahead of time whether the plan has gaps or problems that need to be corrected before flu season
- Have an understanding of your organization's normal seasonal absenteeism rates and know how to monitor your personnel for any unusual increases in absenteeism through the fall and winter
- Engage state and local health department to confirm channels of communication and methods for dissemination of local outbreak information
- Allow sick workers to stay home without fear of losing their jobs

- ❑ Develop other flexible leave policies to allow workers to stay home to care for sick family members or for children if schools dismiss students or child care programs close
- ❑ Share your influenza pandemic plan with employees and explain what human resources policies, workplace and leave flexibilities, and pay and benefits will be available to them
- ❑ Share best practices with other businesses in your communities (especially those in your supply chain), chambers of commerce, and associations to improve community response efforts
- ❑ Add a “widget” or “button” to your company Web page or employee Web sites so employees can access the latest information on influenza: www.cdc.gov/widgets/ and www.cdc.gov/SocialMedia/Campaigns/H1N1/buttons.html

Important components of a pandemic influenza plan

- ❑ Be prepared to implement multiple measures to protect workers and ensure business continuity. A layered approach will likely work better than using just one measure.
- ❑ Identify possible work-related exposure and health risks to your employees. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has developed tools to determine if your employees are at risk of work-related exposures and, if so, how to respond - (see www.osha.gov/dsg/topics/pandemicflu/index.html).
- ❑ Review human resources policies to make sure that policies and practices are consistent with public health recommendations and are consistent with existing state and federal workplace laws (for more information on employer responsibilities, employers should visit the Department of Labor’s and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission’s websites at www.dol.gov and www.eeoc.gov).
- ❑ Allow employees to stay home if they are ill, have to care for ill family members, or must watch their children if schools or childcare facilities close.
- ❑ Explore whether you can establish policies and practices, such as flexible worksites (e.g., telecommuting) and flexible work hours (e.g., staggered shifts), when possible, to increase the physical distance among employees and between employees and others if local public health authorities recommend the use of social distancing strategies. Ensure that you have the information technology and infrastructure needed to support multiple workers who may be able to work from home.
- ❑ Identify essential business functions, essential jobs or roles, and critical elements within your supply chains (e.g., raw materials, suppliers, subcontractor services/products, and logistics) required to maintain business operations. Plan for how your business will operate if there is increasing absenteeism or these supply chains are interrupted.
- ❑ Set up authorities, triggers, and procedures for activating and terminating the company’s response plan, altering business operations (e.g., possibly changing or closing operations in affected areas), and transferring business knowledge to key employees. Work closely with your local health officials to identify these triggers.
- ❑ Plan to minimize exposure to fellow employees or the public if public health officials call for social distancing.
- ❑ Establish a process to communicate information to workers and business partners on your 2009 H1N1 influenza response plans and latest 2009 H1N1 influenza information. Anticipate employee fear, anxiety, rumors, and misinformation, and plan communications accordingly.
- ❑ For resources to assist in your planning efforts, visit www.flu.gov/plan/workplaceplanning/index.html.

Recommended action steps

For employees under current flu conditions

(Similar severity as in spring/summer 2009)

Sick people should stay home

- ❑ Advise workers to be alert to any signs of fever and any other signs of influenza-like illness before reporting to work each day, and notify their supervisor and stay home if they are ill. Employees who are ill should not travel while they are ill
- ❑ Employees with influenza-like illness should remain at home until at least 24 hours after they are free of fever (100° F [37.8° C] or greater) without the use of fever-reducing medications
- ❑ Expect sick employees to be out for about 3 to 5 days in most cases, even if antiviral medications are used
- ❑ Ensure that your sick leave policies are flexible and consistent with public health guidance and that employees are well aware of these policies
- ❑ Talk with companies that provide your company with contract or temporary workers about the importance of sick workers staying home and 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
- ❑ Employees who are well but who have an ill family member at home with influenza can go to work as usual. However, these employees should monitor their health every day, and notify their supervisor and stay home if they become ill. Employers should maintain flexible policies that permit employees to stay home to care for an ill family member. Employers should be aware that more workers may need to stay at home to care for ill children or other ill family members than is usual.

Employees sick at work should be advised to go home

- ❑ CDC recommends that workers who appear to have an influenza-like illness upon arrival or become ill during the day be promptly separated from other workers and be advised to go home until at least 24 hours after they are free of fever (100° F [37.8° C] or greater), or signs of a fever, without the use of fever-reducing medications.
- ❑ Those who become ill with symptoms of an influenza-like illness during the work day should be
 - Separated from other workers and asked to go home promptly. Personal protective equipment is recommended for a person assisting the ill employee
 - When possible and if they can tolerate it, workers with influenza-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
- ❑ If an employee becomes ill at work, inform fellow employees of their possible exposure in the workplace to influenza-like illness but maintain confidentiality as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). For more information on privacy issues, please refer to:
http://www.flu.gov/faq/workplace_questions/equal_employment/index.html#PrivacyIs

[sues](#). 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

Provide tissues and no-touch disposal receptacles for use by employees

Practice good hand hygiene

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.

Clean surfaces likely to be touched often

Frequently clean all commonly touched surfaces in the workplace, such as workstations, countertops, and doorknobs. 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.

Encourage employees to get vaccinated

Workers should be encouraged to get seasonal flu as well as H1N1 flu vaccinations. Review the health benefits you offer employees and work with insurers to explore if they can cover the costs of influenza vaccination. Consider granting employees time off from work to get vaccinated if flu shots are not offered at the worksite.

Protect employees who are at higher risk of complications from flu

- People at higher risk for complications from influenza include pregnant women; children under 5 years of age; adults and children who have chronic lung disease (such as asthma), heart disease, diabetes, diseases that suppress the immune system and other chronic medical conditions; and those who are 65 years or older
- Inform employees that some people are at higher risk of complications from influenza and that if they are at higher risk for complications, they should check with their health care provider if they become ill. Early treatment with antiviral medications is very important for people at high risk because it can prevent hospitalizations and deaths.

Prepare for increased absenteeism

- Employers should plan to monitor and respond to absenteeism at the workplace. Implement plans to continue your essential functions in case you experience higher than usual absenteeism. Elevated absentee rates can be due to sick workers, those who need to stay home and 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 so that the workplace is able to operate even if key staff are absent
- 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, prioritize customers, or temporarily suspend some of your operations if needed).

Advise employees who are traveling to take certain steps

- Advise workers to 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 who will be traveling or on temporary assignment about precautions they may need to take to protect their health and who to call if they become ill.

- Employees who become ill while traveling and are at increased risk of complications from influenza and others concerned about their illness should promptly call a health care provider for advice.
- Ensure employees who become ill while traveling or on temporary assignment understand that they should notify their supervisor.
- If outside the United States, ill employees should follow your 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.

Prepare for the possibility of school and childcare center dismissals

- 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
- Strongly recommend that parents not bring their children with them to work while schools are dismissed
- Ensure that your leave policies are flexible and non-punitive
- Cross-train employees to cover essential functions

Under conditions with increased severity Compared to spring/summer 2009

If 2009 H1N1 becomes more severe than during spring/summer 2009, absenteeism will likely be far greater, and additional protective measures to slow the spread of influenza may be considered. Check with your local health department for the extent and severity of disease activity in your community and for recommendations for necessary measures. Decisions about what tools should be used during a severe 2009 H1N1 outbreak should be based on the observed severity of the event; its impact on specific subpopulations; the need to protect workers; the expected benefit of the interventions; the feasibility of success of implementing these measures; the direct and indirect costs of different interventions; and the effects on critical infrastructure, health care delivery, and society. The following are measures that should be considered if influenza severity increases, and are meant for use *in addition* to the measures outlined above.

Consider active screening of employees who report to work

If influenza severity increases, at the beginning of the workday or with each new shift, all employees should be asked about symptoms consistent with an influenza illness

Consider alternative work environments

If influenza severity increases and if influenza transmission is high in the community, employers may want to evaluate their work environment to see how they can reduce the number of people that high-risk employees come in contact with, such as exploring options for telecommuting from home (if feasible). Employers can also think about how workers at higher risk for influenza complications could be reassigned to duties that have minimal contact with other employees, clients, or customers. If these workers cannot be reassigned duties to reduce contact with others, are concerned about their ability to avoid influenza at the workplace, or will be in crowded conditions at work or while commuting to work, then consider allowing employees at higher risk for influenza complications to stay home from work.

Consider social distancing in the workplace

The goal should be for there to be at least 6 feet of distance between people at most times. This is not a simple or easy strategy and would typically require considerable flexibility. These measures may include avoiding crowded work settings, canceling business-related face-to-face meetings, spacing workers farther apart, canceling non-essential travel, increasing use of teleworking, and using staggered shifts to allow fewer workers to be in the workplace at the same time.

Consider canceling non-essential traveling

NOTE: The severity of 2009 H1N1 influenza could change rapidly; therefore, local public health recommendations to communities and businesses could be revised quickly. Planners should identify sources of timely and accurate information so they are aware of changes to recommendations and can promptly implement revised or additional measures recommended by local public health officials.

(Source: CDC)