

Novel H1N1 Flu - Creating a Safe and Healthy Workplace

[Announcer] This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC – safer, healthier people.

CDC understands that businesses are concerned about the health and safety of their workers and worksites during this outbreak of novel H1N1 flu. This podcast answers many of the questions we've received from the business community and will provide your organization with information on resources and tools to effectively respond to the outbreak.

Novel H1N1 is a new influenza virus causing illness in people. The virus was first detected in people in the United States in April 2009; other countries have also reported people sick with the new virus. CDC expects that more cases, hospitalizations, and deaths from this outbreak will occur over the coming days and weeks.

Businesses are essential partners in protecting the public's health and safety during this outbreak. The health of employees during an outbreak such as novel H1N1 influenza plays a critical role in the continued operations of a business. The workforce, like the public, needs clear, concise, consistent information.

H1N1 flu is a completely new disease that isn't comparable to the seasonal flu we see each year. One of the differences is that H1N1 flu is attacking healthy teens and adults. With seasonal flu, the very young and the very old are at greatest risk because their immune systems are less effective than those of healthy adults.

It's difficult to make accurate predictions on the length of time it may take for the novel H1N1 flu to run its course in the U.S. Past outbreaks have had different durations and affected different percentages of the population in different ways. Outbreaks of new influenza viruses usually last much longer than seasonal flu, and often come in waves. The health impact in terms of severity of each wave has also varied.

Here are some ways to protect employees and worksites:

Sick employees should stay home and not come to work. People who have the flu can spread it to others and the flu virus can spread easily when people are close together. If someone is sick with novel H1N1 flu, they'll probably have symptoms similar to those of seasonal flu, including fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills, and fatigue. A significant number of people have also reported diarrhea and vomiting.

Tell employees you *don't* want them coming to work sick so they don't worry about losing their job. Let them know their job is safe if they need to care for someone who is sick or are sick themselves. CDC recommends that people who are sick with novel H1N1 flu stay home for seven days after the onset of illness or at least 24 hours after symptoms have subsided, whichever is longer.

To stay healthy or to stop the spread of the virus, remind your employees to do these four things:

1. Cover their nose and mouth with a tissue when they cough or sneeze and then throw the tissue in the trash.
2. Wash their hands often with soap and water, especially after coughing or sneezing, or use an alcohol-based hand cleaner if soap and water aren't available.
3. Avoid touching their eyes, nose, or mouth to prevent spreading germs.
4. Try to avoid close contact with sick people.

In order to ensure business continuity, develop a plan to protect your employees and maintain operations during this H1N1 flu outbreak. Companies that provide critical infrastructure services, such as power and telecommunications, have a special responsibility to plan for continued operation in a crisis, including consideration for significant absenteeism. Having a contingency plan is essential.

There are no special precautions for workers who handle or deliver packages, other than practicing good hand hygiene. If soap and water aren't available to these employees, make sure they have a supply of alcohol-based hand cleaner. Instruct them to use it after each contact with customers, including after sharing a pen with customers.

Although the current H1N1 flu virus is new and scientists are still studying it, studies on other forms of flu viruses have shown that influenza virus can survive on environmental surfaces, such as books, countertops, door knobs, and money, and can infect a person for up to eight hours after being deposited on the surface. It's important to note that in the transportation and shipping industry, banking institutions, and retail businesses - where money and goods move daily - workers have *not* shown an increase in infection rates during periods of seasonal influenza. To prevent the spread of the virus, it's important to keep surfaces, especially commonly touched surfaces, such as work stations, countertops, and bathroom surfaces, clean by wiping them down with a household disinfectant, according to label directions.

Employees who need to travel for business can protect themselves by doing a few simple things. All travelers should wash their hands often with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand cleaner. Travelers may also want to bring alcohol-based sanitizing wipes that can be used to clean hard surfaces near their seat on the airplane, such as seat arms, seatbelt, fold-down tray, and overhead bins.

For more information on how to stay healthy during travel and any updates on CDC travel notices, please visit CDC's Travelers' Health website at www.cdc.gov/travel.

For help in preparing your business for the novel H1N1 flu, visit www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/business where you'll find resources, tools, and information for businesses OR call 1-800-CDC-INFO, that's 1-800-232-4636.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO, 24/7.