



Public Health Guidance to Employers for Preventing Transmission of H1N1 in the Workplace

Given the current level of concern over the H1N1 influenza virus (Swine Flu), employers need to be prepared to take reasonable steps when employees and/or visitors are experiencing flu like symptoms.

At this time, we are dealing with a new flu virus whose symptoms appear to be similar to other common flu strains. Employers should be familiar with simple measures to reduce the risk of infection in the workplace and prepare for impact of illness on their operations. Up-to-date information on H1N1 can be accessed at the State of California Public Health Toll-Free Hotline at 1-888-865-0564 and the Santa Clara County Public Health Department website <http://swineflu.sccgov.org/>.

Medical/health providers can access physician alerts at <http://swineflu.sccgov.org/medical-health-partners>.

What is the H1N1 flu?

H1N1 flu is a respiratory infection caused by influenza viruses. There have been reports of serious illness and death due to H1N1 flu in Mexico, but most of the recently confirmed cases in the United States have been mild and no more serious than seasonal influenza.

How is the H1N1 virus spread?

Human transmission is thought to occur in the same way as seasonal flu: through respiratory droplets that are released when an infected person coughs or sneezes. These droplets can infect people in close proximity.

Who is at risk for H1N1 influenza?

Anyone who has contact with an infected person may be exposed to H1N1 flu. Influenza is most contagious while the infected person is experiencing fever and /or cough.

What are the symptoms of H1N1 flu?

Swine flu symptoms appear to be similar to those of seasonal flu and usually include fever accompanied by cough, sore throat, fatigue, headache, body aches, lethargy, stuffy nose or chills. Some affected people have also reported diarrhea and vomiting.

What are tips for preventing illness in the workplace?

- **Most important:** remind employees that they should not come to work if they have flu symptoms (fever and cough) and not return until 24 hours after symptoms resolve.
- Encourage employees to avoid touching their eyes, nose or mouth; and to wash their hands before eating, after using the bathroom and any time hands are soiled. If a workplace lacks soap and water, an alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing 60% to 95% alcohol is a good substitute. Good hand hygiene is the best protection against contact with the virus on surfaces or other people's hands.

What precautions can help prevent the spread of the H1N1 flu in offices and public places?

No special precautions are needed, but building managers and owners should enforce good workplace hygiene practices:

- Make sure all hand washing facilities are equipped with adequate hand soap and paper towels.
- Clean surfaces that people touch often, such as doorknobs, door handles, handrails, shared PCs and telephones, as well as surfaces in bathrooms, cafeterias and offices.
- Advise employees and building visitors to wash their hands frequently, and to cover their coughs. Posting signs can be helpful, and signs are available for download at <http://www.sccgov.org/portal/site/phd/agencychp?path=%2Fv7%2FPublic%20Health%20Department%20%28DEP%29%2FPandemic%20Influenza%2FPandemic%20Information>
- There is currently no evidence to suggest that special vacuuming equipment or procedures are necessary. Upholstery, carpets, drapes and vertical surfaces don't require special cleaning unless they are visibly soiled.
- Keep all heating and ventilation systems in good working order in accordance with system specifications and any applicable regulations.

What should I tell employees who have flu-like symptoms?

Employees with flu-like symptoms, such as fever (temperature above 100 degrees Fahrenheit) and cough, should stay home and call their doctor or health care provider. Please download "Quick Facts About Swine Flu" from <http://swineflu.sccgov.org/> .

Anyone with *severe* symptoms should seek health care and treatment immediately. In adults, symptoms that warrant emergency medical attention include:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting

How long should employees with flu-like illness remain home from work?

People who have H1N1 flu are usually contagious for up to 10 days after onset of illness. The Health Department recommends that people stay home until they have been free of symptoms for 24 hours. Employers should consider having telecommuting options for employees who need to stay home.

Should employees with flu-like symptoms get a flu test before returning to work?

No. Employees who are feeling well can return to work 24 hours after symptoms resolve. There is no need to test them for an absence of influenza.

Should employees who have traveled to Mexico be excluded from work?

No. Travelers returning from Mexico do *not* need to be excluded from work if they are feeling well (no fever or cough).

What information should I share with employees?

Communicating good hygiene and infection-control practices will help keep your workforce healthy. Employers can use website, hotlines, and posters to inform workers about the symptoms and spread of influenza, and to encourage good hygiene.

Early and active communication can also help prevent fear and anxiety during an outbreak. Employers should be wary about rumors about H1N1 infection in employees or elsewhere. For timely information online, visit the websites of the Santa Clara County Public Health Department (<http://swineflu.sccgov.org/>), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (<http://cdc.gov/h1n1flu/>), or the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (www.pandemicflu.gov).

Should companies restrict business travel to prevent H1N1 flu?

As of April 27, the CDC issued a travel warning which recommends that U.S. travelers avoid all non-essential travel to Mexico. If you must travel to an area that reported cases of swine flu, please refer the CDC website for more information at

<http://wwwn.cdc.gov/travel/contentSwineFluMexico.aspx>

When should I close down my office?

Thus far there has been no need for U.S. employers to close down businesses or offices, or to cancel meetings to prevent the spread of H1N1 (SO) influenza.

What kind of cleaners should be used for cleaning surfaces?

The H1N1 (SO) virus can be killed with common household or commercial detergents and disinfectants. Use general cleaners or soap and water. As an added precaution, disinfectants can be used on frequently contacted surfaces.

- Disinfectant wipes can also be used to clean small surfaces. Discard wipes after using them.
- If disinfectants are not available, use a chlorine bleach solution made by adding 1 tablespoon of bleach to a quart (4 cups) of water. Discard the bleach solution after using it.
- Never mix bleach with cleaning products because hazardous vapors can be created.
- If hard surfaces are visibly dirty, clean first using general cleaner or soap and water. After surface has been cleaned, apply disinfectant following product instructions.
- For additional information on the EPA's list of registered disinfectants and antimicrobial products see www.epa.gov/oppad001/chemregindex.htm and www.epa.gov/oppad001/ad_info.htm

How can I plan ahead for a pandemic?

Think about how you would run your business if a large share of your employees were absent. Consider the impact that school closures could have. And make contingency plans, such as allowing telecommuting or staggered shifts. You should also review your sick-leave policies and consider how they would affect employees who become ill. For more information on how businesses can plan for large disease outbreaks, visit www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/workplaceplanning/index.html and the Santa Clara County Public Health Department's pandemic flu website <http://www.sccphd.org>