

# FLU GUIDANCE

## for Businesses

Businesses and employers play a vital role in protecting the health of their employees from the H1N1 and seasonal flu viruses that will circulate this flu season. Businesses and employers can limit negative effects of the flu for employees, the community and the economy through planning, coordinating response strategies and establishing clear communication channels.

### Employee and Customer Health

Influenza viruses are spread on respiratory droplets that are expelled into the air when a person coughs or sneezes. The virus is then inhaled by someone else or falls on a surface where it can be picked up by someone and introduced into their body through their eyes, nose or mouth. The best protection against the flu is the flu vaccine. Encourage employees to get vaccinated against seasonal flu and H1N1 flu. For information on flu vaccines, please see:

- <http://www.fighttheflumo.com/materials/SeasonalFluQA.pdf> (seasonal)
- [http://www.fighttheflumo.com/materials/H1N1Vaccine\\_QA.pdf](http://www.fighttheflumo.com/materials/H1N1Vaccine_QA.pdf) (H1N1)

In addition to encouraging employees to get vaccinated, you can prevent the spread of flu in your business with the following practices:

- Instruct employees to wash their hands often with soap and water or use alcohol-based hand cleaner, especially after coughing or sneezing. Provide and maintain adequate supplies of soap, paper towels and alcohol-based hand sanitizer for employee use.
- Ensure routine cleaning of surfaces and items that have frequent hand contact, such as work stations, countertops, telephones, computers and doorknobs. Flu viruses can survive on surfaces and infect a person who touches them for up to eight hours.
- Remind employees to cover coughs and sneezes. Place posters in the worksite to encourage proper cough and sneeze etiquette. Such posters are available at <http://www.FightTheFluMO.com>. Place tissues and no-touch trash receptacles throughout the office.

One of the best ways to reduce the flu from spreading is to keep sick people away from those that are well. Employees should stay home if they are sick and remain at home until 24 hours after they are fever-free without the use of fever-reducing medications. If an employee becomes ill while at work, separate them from other workers and advise that employee to go home. Employees exposed to the illness should monitor themselves for flu-like symptoms and stay home if they are sick.

If your business requires employee travel, advise employees on certain steps before traveling:

- Employees should take precautions to protect their health while traveling.
- If flu-like symptoms set in while an employee is traveling, that person may be at higher risk for complications from the flu and should call a health care provider for advice.
- Review travel policies for employees. Include protocol for employees if they become ill while traveling, especially outside the United States.

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## **Business Planning**

Many businesses may have already felt the impact of the flu since the H1N1 flu virus began circulating in the spring of 2009. Although flu-like illnesses have started to decrease, historically flu outbreaks occur in waves. It is important to consider planning for your business, should another wave of illness occur. Planning appropriate response strategies should include:

- Reducing flu transmission among staff
- Protecting people who are at increased risk of flu
- Maintaining business operations
- Minimizing adverse effects on other entities within business networks
- Preserving core functions of the business by evaluating absenteeism thresholds needed to maintain those functions

Partnership and communication with your local public health department is strongly encouraged so that timely, credible information can be obtained and utilized in response strategies. This information will be specific to the local community and provide guidance accordingly.

Consider including the following actions in designing your plan:

- Review or establish a flexible, layered flu pandemic plan and involve your employees in the planning process
- Understand seasonal absenteeism rates and how to monitor increases in these rates throughout flu season
- Review human resources policies to ensure current policies and practices are consistent with public health recommendations and are consistent with existing state and federal workplace laws
- Share your flu plan with employees
- Allow employees to stay home if they are sick, to care for sick family members, or if childcare facilities or schools close
- Evaluate flexible work options such as telecommuting or staggering shifts to increase distance between employees. If these options are not possible, plan ways to increase distance between people if flu severity increases
- Identify core business functions and resources required to maintain those functions. Plan for ways that your business will maintain operations should absenteeism increase creating interruptions in necessary resources
- Communicate with your local health department and establish methods for communicating information to employees and business partners
- Anticipate employee fear, anxiety, rumors and misinformation and make plans accordingly

Revise sick leave policies as well as policies that encourage healthy practices and clearly convey these policies to employees and customers.