



MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS

ACTION STEPS FOR MEDICAL OFFICES AND OUTPATIENT FACILITIES

It is vital that medical offices and outpatient facilities manage an increased demand for services and maintain a sustainable community healthcare response during a novel H1N1 influenza outbreak in the community. The following actions will help ensure success.

- 1. Provide seasonal flu immunizations to your staff at no cost** – Seasonal flu vaccine will not protect against novel H1N1 influenza, but it is recommended for health care professionals and will likely protect against seasonal influenza strains.
- 2. Develop a business continuity plan** – Novel H1N1 flu outbreaks will impact your organization, employees, suppliers of critical materiel and your family. Identify your facility's essential functions and the individuals trained to perform them. Make cross training a priority to ensure you have staffing depth. Plan to sustain your core business activities for several weeks. Plan alternate ways to acquire critical supplies in case your normal supply chain is disrupted.
- 3. Plan for a surge of patients and increased demands for your services** – Utilize clear and frequent communication with employees. Explain policies and procedures that will be used to protect staff and patients as you manage the surge. Encourage staff to develop individual family plans to bolster your organization's resiliency. Consider using your telephone system to deliver messages to incoming callers about when to seek medical care at your facility, when to seek emergency care, and where to go for information about caring for a person with flu at home. Consider extending your hours of operation to include telephone triage of patients during a community outbreak.
- 4. Take precautions to protect your staff during an outbreak of H1N1** – Establish policies for use of respiratory and eye protection during all interaction with a patient who may have novel H1N1 influenza. Encourage frequent handwashing. Provide adequate access to sinks, soap, paper towels and hand sanitizer. Stockpile sufficient PPE for your staff.
- 5. Protect your workplace by asking sick employees to stay home** – Establish an environment that encourages sick staff to stay home without fear of losing their jobs or being reprimanded. Staff should be encouraged to self monitor daily for signs and symptoms of febrile respiratory illness, and should not report to work if symptomatic. Staff who develop symptoms while at work should notify their supervisor and discontinue patient care activities.
- 6. Plan how to operate your facility despite significant staff absenteeism** – Address ways to continue operating with only 60% of your workforce. Develop a cross-training program. Identify non-critical services that can be temporarily discontinued, if necessary.
- 7. Care for patients with novel H1N1 flu in your facility** – Make plans to screen patients for signs and symptoms of febrile respiratory illness at entry to the facility. If feasible, use separate waiting and exam rooms for possible novel H1N1 flu patients. Make plans to offer surgical masks to symptomatic patients who are able to wear them (adult and pediatric sizes should be available). Provide access to tissues, trash cans and hand sanitizer in waiting rooms and exam rooms.
- 8. Make sure you know about the pandemic planning and response activities of the hospitals, outpatient facilities and local public health department in your community** – Actively seek information from and coordinate with key medical, clinical facilities and the public health department in your community to learn about how they will manage patients during a pandemic. A coordinated community response will be necessary to manage surge and assure optimal patient care. Develop a plan to manage your patients who do not need to seek emergency services.
- 9. Work with your local public health department to ensure messaging consistency** – Consistent information will be critical for ensuring your patients' are empowered to make the best possible decisions about their health. It can also be a resource multiplier, enabling you and your staff to do your jobs. Consistent, credible, timely information will also help ensure that people take appropriate actions, based on the recommendations of your office and your local public health department.
- 10. Be prepared for a range of situations** - The true impact of novel H1N1 flu outbreaks in the coming months will not be known until it happens. Be prepared for a possibility that your facility will have significant increased demand for services and the possibility that the next outbreak may have greater impact than the outbreak in the spring of 2009.