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H1N1 (Swine Flu): Important Information for Businesses

This document is up to date as of 9/8/2009 12:00:00 PM

The following information comes from the Howard County Community Emergency Response Network (CERN), the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the Trust for America's Health.

What is H1N1?

H1N1 or swine flu is an illness caused by a new form of the flu virus. The virus is spreading from person-to-person just like the regular flu.

What's the big deal about H1N1?

H1N1 is a new form of the flu virus. Because it is new, we don't have any immunity to it.

Is there a vaccine?

A vaccine to prevent H1N1 is still being tested. The best way to prevent the spread of H1N1 is by staying away from sick people, washing your hands often, and covering your cough.

Should I urge my workers to get a seasonal flu shot?

Yes. It will protect them against the seasonal flu. Flu shots are one key way to keep your workers healthy and on the job. The Howard County Health Department will have its annual FREE drive-thru flu clinic on Sunday, October 4th from 10 AM to 2 PM around the Columbia Gateway Drive Loop (enter from Rt 175). Flu shots and flu mist will be available.

How does H1N1 spread?

People with the flu can give you the virus if they cough or sneeze near you. You can also become sick by touching something with germs on it, such as door knobs, and then touching your eyes, mouth or nose. Unless they need urgent medical help, adults who are sick should be cared for at home.

How long is a person with H1N1 able to give the flu to others?

This is still unknown. You may be able to spread flu germs for up to 1 day before and up to 7 days after you start having symptoms.

What are the symptoms?

Fever and one or more of the following:

- Cough
- Sore throat
- Body aches
- Headache
- Chills and fatigue
- Sometimes vomiting and diarrhea

What are six easy steps that businesses can take to help slow the spread of H1N1:

1. Stay home when sick:

People with the flu should stay away from others for at least 24 hours after their fever is gone. The fever should be gone without the use of a fever-lowering medicine. Sick workers should stay home even if they are using antiviral drugs.

2. Separate ill workers from healthy workers:

Workers who become sick with flu-like symptoms at work should be sent to a room separate from others until they can go home. If possible, they should wear a surgical mask while they wait.

3. Cover your cough and wash your hands:

Ask workers to wash their hands often with soap and water. Everyone should cover noses and mouths with a tissue when coughing or sneezing (or a shirt sleeve or elbow if no tissue is available).

4. Clean often:

Use normal cleaners to clean door knobs, desks, chairs, and other surface areas that workers touch. Clean them often. No other special cleaning is needed.

5. High-risk workers should see a doctor right away if they get sick:

Anyone can get the flu. Those below should call their doctor right away if they have the signs of H1N1.

- Children less than 5 years old;
- Persons aged 65 years or older;
- Children and teens (less than 18 years) who are on long-term aspirin therapy;
- Pregnant women;
- Adults and children who have chronic diseases;
- Adults and children who have HIV or immune system problems;
- Residents of nursing homes and other chronic-care places.

6. Work with the health department:

If 10% of your workers call out sick with flu-like illness, call the Howard County Health Department for advice.

What should I tell workers about H1N1?

Give them tips on how they can stay healthy. Remind workers to cover coughs, wash hands often, and stay home if sick. You will find helpful tip-sheets and flyers to post at <http://www.hchealth.org>

What should I tell workers with children?

Children with flu-like symptoms should not go to school, child care, or day care. Workers should plan ahead now for alternate child-care should schools and day cares be forced to close.

Should my workers wear masks?

Not at this time. Sick workers should stay home and avoid contact with others for at least 24 hours after their fever is gone. The fever should be gone without the use of a fever-lowering medicine.

Should we require social distancing (no handshakes, separate workspaces, etc.)?

Not at this time. Sick workers should stay home and avoid contact with others for at least 24 hours after their fever is gone. The fever should be gone without the use of a fever-lowering medicine.

What steps should I take if this flu outbreak gets worse?

Plan now to keep your business in business should this outbreak get worse. The Trust for America's Health suggests these 10 steps to prepare for a more serious flu outbreak. Keep in mind that some of these steps take time.

Step 1: Check that your existing emergency plans will work in the event of a long-term flu outbreak.

Step 2: Check to see that core business activities can continue over several weeks with fewer workers.

Step 3: Plan ahead for possible stoppage of trash pickup and problems with transportation, water, power, and food supply.

Step 4: Know your company's key jobs and the people who perform them. If these workers get sick, it could hurt your business. Cross-train workers for key jobs in the event that 25-30 percent of your workers get sick.

Step 5: Keep your workers healthy by posting tips on how to stop the spread of germs at work. Urge workers to wash their hands often. Have alcohol-based hand wipes and gels available for your workers to use.

Step 6: Decide which outside activities are important to keeping your business going. For example, who else do you rely on to deliver supplies to your company?

Step 7: Consider allowing your workers to work from home during a flu outbreak if possible.

Step 8: Expand online and self-service options for customers and business partners.

Step 9: Update your employees often about the flu outbreak and your company's plans.

Step 10: Update sick leave and medical leave policies. Urge workers to stay at home if they are sick.

Where can I go for more information on how to prepare my business for a pandemic flu outbreak?

The Howard County's Community Emergency Response Network (CERN) can help businesses prepare for emergencies like the flu.

See <http://www.bepreparedbeready.org/ht/d/sp/i/216/pid/216> or download their planning resources from our website.

CERN offers other tools to help keep you in business during emergencies. See <http://www.bepreparedbeready.org/>

Where can I go for more information or resources?

Howard County Health Department – www.hchealth.org
The Health Department will update our website regularly about H1N1.

For more information, we recommend that you go to the following websites:

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
<http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/business/guidance/>

The State of Maryland
<http://www.dhmdh.md.gov/swineflu/index.html>