



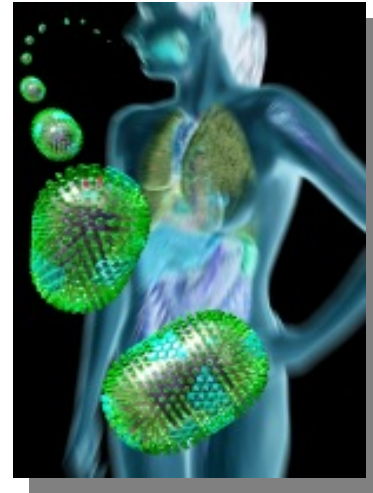
Safety Bulletin

Pandemic Flu – 15 Ways Employers Can Prepare

A potential flu pandemic in addition to huge public health implications could also have a massive economic impact.

In the employment setting, it could cause employee illness and absenteeism to soar.

Although there is currently no need for alarm, it is prudent to assume that the present H1N1 (Swine Flu) virus spreading across our communities is going to get worse. The flu virus will come in waves with resulting illness and possible deaths across the United States.



It makes good business sense to think about the impact of wide-spread illness and absenteeism now. You should develop emergency plans to help manage a possible foreseeable crisis--and hope you'll never have to use them. A flu pandemic raises unusual and complex concerns about how to protect employee health and your organization's economic well being. For example, has your company considered how it could fulfill customer orders if 25 percent of the workforce was out sick? Do you have educational efforts in place to boost employee hygiene? Are your leave policies generous enough to encourage workers to self-quarantine rather than come to work when they might have a serious contagious illness such as the H1N1-Swine Flu?

Fifteen Planning and Preparation Steps for a Pandemic

Just as with preparedness for possible severe storms, fires, earthquakes, or terrorism, there's much you can do to make sure you're not broadsided and left scrambling if this present flu virus or other pandemic should occur. Here's a list of steps all businesses can take to prepare:

1. Someone within your organization should begin by identifying essential functions and individuals (including employees, suppliers, and contractors) that would be needed to maintain business operations during a pandemic.
 2. Identify people who could take over these essential functions if necessary.
 3. Consider alternative sources for supplies and other outside services in case your normal channels are unavailable.
 4. Establish an emergency communications plan with key contacts, chain of communications, and processes for tracking and communicating employee status. Consider hotlines and dedicated websites for communicating information in a timely and efficient way to employees, customers, suppliers, and vendors, both inside and outside the workplace.
 5. Gather up-to-date and reliable sources of information on the pandemic from public health, emergency management sources, Marcotte Insurance Risk Services, and pay attention to their guidance.
 6. Plan for how to safely continue business operations or safely evacuate employees if essential services, such as power, water, and public transportation, are interrupted.
 7. Forecast and allow for employee absences during a pandemic. They could need to be out because of their own illness, a family member's illness, quarantines, and school or business closures.
 8. Establish policies to cover:
 - a. Employee compensation and sick-leave absences, non-punitive and liberal leave is recommended to encourage workers to stay home when ill
 - b. When previously ill employees can return to work
 - c. Telecommuting and flexible work hours
 - d. How to respond when employees who have been exposed to the pandemic flu are suspected to be ill or become ill at work
 - e. Restrictions on business travel to affected geographic areas
 9. Develop guidelines to help minimize the frequency of face-to-face contact among workers and between workers and customers. Consider seating in meetings, office layout, shared workstations, and hand-shaking practices.
 10. Notify employees of ways to reduce the spread of germs, such as frequent hand washing and respiratory hygiene/cough etiquette.
 11. Provide infection-control supplies at all worksites, including hand hygiene products, tissues, and wastebaskets.
 12. Evaluate how you can assure that employees will have access to healthcare services if a pandemic occurs.
 13. Supply employees with educational materials about the pandemic, including signs and symptoms of illness and how it's transmitted.
 14. Have an employee assistance plan in place to address employee fears, anxieties, etc.
 15. Educate employees about your pandemic preparedness plan.
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