



PREVENT. PROMOTE. PROTECT.

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NEWS

BUSINESSES CAN HELP LIMIT EFFECT OF H1N1 FLU

HAMILTON COUNTY, OHIO – As public health agencies anticipate the reemergence of H1N1 flu along with seasonal flu this fall and winter, Hamilton County Public Health is encouraging businesses to play a key role in protecting employees' health and limiting the impact of the flu on the community and the economy. General prevention measures and preparedness planning can minimize the spread of H1N1 flu in the workplace.

Encourage Hand Hygiene and Respiratory Etiquette

H1N1 virus seems to spread the same way seasonal flu spreads – mainly from person to person through coughing or sneezing by people with flu. Sometimes people may become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose. Encourage employees to practice proper hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. If soap and water are not near by, use an alcohol-based hand cleaner.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. If a tissue is not available, use the inside of your elbow to cover your cough or sneeze, not your hands.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people. Try to stay six feet away from people who are coughing or sneezing.

Encourage infection control practices by displaying posters that remind workers about these prevention tips and provide ample supplies for hand washing as well as tissues, disinfectants, and disposable towels for employees to clean their work surfaces. Flu virus can survive on environmental surfaces and can infect a person for up to 2-8 hours after being deposited on the surface. Commonly-touched surfaces such as keyboards, counter tops, door knobs and bathroom surfaces should be cleaned regularly with a household disinfectant.

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NEWS

Sick Workers Should Stay Home

Avoiding close contact with sick people is one of the best ways to prevent getting sick with flu; businesses should encourage sick workers to stay home and away from the workplace, and provide flexible leave policies.

- If someone comes to work with flu-like symptoms, they should be sent home as soon as possible. If the employee is unable to leave right away, they should remain in a room by themselves so as not to infect others. Ill employees should stay home from work for at least 24 hours after their fever is gone, without the use of a fever-reducing medicine.
- Examine policies for leave and employee compensation and review with employees so they are up-to-date on sick leave policies, leave donation, and employee assistance services that are covered under health plans. Leave policies should be flexible and non-punitive.
- Plan for the possibility of unscheduled leave that encourages employees who are sick to stay at home to care for themselves and others who are ill with the flu. Keep in mind some employees may have school-age children, and children sick with the flu will be dismissed from school.

Review Business Continuity Plans

Now is the time to review or implement business continuity plans and think about what your organization will do if there is significant absenteeism.

- Review your plan with regard to increases or decreases in demand for your products and/or services during the flu season.
- Establish an emergency communications plan.
- Develop methods (e.g., hotlines, websites) for communicating H1N1 flu status and actions to employees, vendors, suppliers and customers in a consistent and timely way, including redundancies in the emergency contact system.
- Establish policies for flexible worksite (e.g., telecommuting) and flexible work hours (e.g., staggered shifts), if needed.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued general business and workplace guidance for prevention of flu; it can be viewed at www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu.

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