

Talking Points on CDC's Guidance for Businesses and Employers to Plan and Respond to the 2009-2010 Influenza Season

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Topline Messages

- CDC is releasing new guidance that recommends response and planning actions that non-healthcare employers can take now under current flu conditions. These actions will help promote a safer workplace environment for their employees and help maintain continuity in the workplace during the 2009–2010 flu season. The guidance also includes additional strategies to use if flu conditions become more severe.
- The new guidance provides recommendations on ways to decrease the spread of seasonal flu and 2009 H1N1 flu in the workplace while making sure businesses can continue to operate as normally as possible.
- Employers should use this guidance to plan for flu now. This includes 1) developing a flexible flu response plan and related workplace policies, or reviewing and revising an existing pandemic flu plan; 2) making sure employees are involved in the development and review of the plan; and 3) testing key components of the plan.
- This guidance provides a menu of tools employers can use to fight flu, in coordination with local health officials—based on local flu conditions and based on what CDC and other public health organizations know about seasonal flu and are learning about the 2009 H1N1 flu virus.
- We know far more about the 2009 H1N1 flu virus than we did when it arrived in April. But we don't yet know what will happen with 2009 H1N1 flu in the fall and winter. It could remain at levels similar to what we saw last spring and what has continued into the summer. It could go away entirely, or it could get worse.
- Given ongoing 2009 H1N1 flu activity this summer, in combination with circulating seasonal flu in the fall and winter, the CDC anticipates more flu cases, hospitalizations, and deaths.
- Because we can't predict how severe 2009–2010 flu season will be, given the impact of seasonal flu and 2009 H1N1 flu, this guidance is designed to help employers plan for and respond to a continuation of the current flu situation and a more severe outbreak.
- There are things employers can do now to prevent the spread of flu in the workplace and keep their businesses operating as normally as possible. All people with flu-like symptoms should stay home and away from the workplace, hand washing and respiratory etiquette should be encouraged, and routine cleaning of commonly touched surfaces should be performed regularly.
- During a more severe outbreak, employers should take steps to keep people physically apart to reduce the spread of illness (called social distancing). This may include canceling business-related meetings or large gatherings, spacing workers farther apart in the workplace, canceling non-essential travel, and implementing work-from-home strategies.

- CDC and its partners will continue to monitor the spread of flu, the severity of the illness it's causing, and whether the virus is changing. We will provide updates on any changes, revise guidance as needed, and provide further advice to state and local agencies on steps to take.
- Because the 2009-2010 flu season could change rapidly, CDC recommendations may be revised quickly. Employers should make sure they have access to timely and accurate information so that they are aware of changes to the recommendations and can promptly implement any additional measures as a result.

Steps Businesses Can Take Now for Current Flu Conditions

- **People who are sick or become sick with flu-like symptoms**
 - Advise workers to check themselves for any signs of sickness before reporting to work each day; this includes healthy employees with a family member at home with flu.
 - People with flu-like symptoms should be separated from other employees and sent home promptly. They should stay home until at least 24 hours after they are free of fever (100 degrees Fahrenheit or 38 degrees Celsius) or signs of a fever (have chills, feel very warm, have a flushed appearance, or are sweating), without the use of fever-reducing medicines.
 - Review sick-leave policies and consider making them flexible and consistent with public health recommendations. Make sure employees are well-aware of these policies.
 - Try to provide flexible workplace and leave policies for workers who may need to stay home to care for sick family members or care for children if schools are dismissed.
 - Provide information to employees overseas about what to do if they become sick.
- **Hygiene/respiratory etiquette**
 - Employees should wash their hands often with soap and water, especially after coughing or sneezing; alcohol-based hand cleaners can be used if soap and water are not available.
 - Employees should cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue; if possible,
 - Employers should provide tissues and no-touch disposal receptacles for employees.
 - If no tissues are available, encourage employees to cough or sneeze into their arm or sleeve.
- **Routine cleaning**
 - Frequently clean all commonly touched surfaces in the workplace, such as workstations, countertops, and doorknobs.
 - Use the cleaning agents that are usually used in these areas and follow the directions on the label. No additional disinfection beyond routine cleaning is recommended.

- **Take measures to protect people at higher risk of flu complications**
 - Employees at higher risk of complications from flu should check with their healthcare provider for advice or if they become sick; early treatment with antiviral medicines can prevent hospitalizations and deaths. People at higher risk include pregnant women; children under 5 years of age; adults and children with chronic medical conditions (such as asthma, heart disease, or diabetes), and people 65 years of age or older.

- **Vaccination**
 - When seasonal flu vaccine is available, consider offering it to all employees who want to reduce the risk for becoming sick with flu. If possible, offer seasonal flu vaccination opportunities at the worksite. Employees at higher risk for 2009 H1N1 flu complications should be encouraged to receive the 2009 H1N1 flu vaccine when it becomes available.

- **Plan how to maintain business operations with a reduced staff**
 - Plan to maintain business operations if a large number of employees are home sick or are staying home to care for sick family members or children dismissed from school.
 - Make contingency plans for when a lot of employees will need to stay home from work; this could include cross-training employees and hiring temporary workers.

Additional Steps Businesses Can Take When Flu Conditions are More Severe

- **Check with employees who report to work**
 - At the beginning of the workday or with each new shift, ask employees if they have flu symptoms such as fever or chills *and* cough or sore throat during the last 24 hours. Other possible symptoms are runny nose, body aches, headache, tiredness, diarrhea, or vomiting. Workers with flu-like symptoms should be asked to go home.
 - Continue to advise workers to check for any signs of illness before reporting to work each day.
 - Encourage employees with underlying medical conditions (such as asthma, heart disease, or diabetes) or who are pregnant to contact their healthcare provider for advice about what to do if they become sick. If they become sick, they should seek care immediately.
 - If flu conditions in your area become more severe, ask sick workers to stay at home for at least 7 days, even if their symptoms go away sooner. If they're still sick after 7 days, they should stay home at least 24 hours after symptoms have gone away.

- **Social distancing to reduce the spread of the disease**

- Consider letting employees who are at higher risk for flu complications work from home or stay home; if these options are not feasible, re-assign job duties so they have less contact with clients, customers, and other employees.
- If the outbreak is severe, employers should consider using some of these steps, if possible: cancel non-essential face-to-face meetings; cancel non-essential travel; space employees farther apart in the workplace or assign them to telework; and stagger shifts to allow fewer workers to be in the workplace at the same time.