



SAN MATEO COUNTY HEALTH SYSTEM

What Employees and Employers Can Do to Reduce Spreading the Flu

October 20, 2009

There are a number of things employees and employers can do to reduce influenza illness this season. **Please take advantage of these opportunities.**

1. Get Vaccinated

Getting vaccinated is the most important thing you can do this year to protect yourself. This raises your immunity to the flu and when enough people are vaccinated, transmission will slow significantly. Flu vaccination efforts are more challenging this year because 1) there are two vaccines – one for seasonal flu and one for H1N1 (swine) flu and 2) there are delays in delivery of both vaccines. While almost everyone should be vaccinated, many of you may have to wait until December or January to get these vaccines. You can follow availability of vaccine locally at www.smhealth.org/swineflu under Vaccines.

2. If You are Sick, Stay Home

If you are sick with flu symptoms, stay at home. Our healthcare system is likely to be very busy this winter. Avoid doctor visits unless you are very sick. Being very sick includes having severe nausea and vomiting, a very high fever, shortness of breath, etc.¹ If you do get sick with flu symptoms, stay home until your fever (100 F) is gone for at least 24 hours without needing to take any medicine to reduce fever. In order to encourage sick people to stay at home and not further overwhelm healthcare providers, it would be best to review any policy requiring employees to document short term flu illness with a doctor's note or bring a return to work clearance note from their doctor before returning to work.

3. Follow Infection Prevention Practices

Follow basic infection control measures at home and at work:

- Cough or sneeze into tissue or sleeve;
- Clean hands frequently with soap and water or alcohol-based hand cleaner, especially after coughing or sneezing and before eating;
- Go home if flu symptoms develop while at work.

Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth without a tissue or with unwashed hands since viruses can enter the body through these sites. This is especially important after handling materials from ill clients.

Routinely **clean and disinfect surfaces and items** that are likely to be touched or handled such as doorknobs, keyboards, telephones, elevator buttons, etc. You may use diluted bleach, disinfectant wipes, or other cleaners that kill flu viruses. Additional disinfection beyond routine cleaning is not recommended.

¹ This is not meant to substitute for your doctor's advice if you are under a doctor's care or suffer from any chronic condition that is not seasonal or pandemic influenza.

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4. Post Signs and Information throughout Facilities

Post information on hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette, and staying home when sick. Good places for signage include entrances and inside buildings, as well as on websites where people access information or services. Signage can be downloaded at www.smhealth.org/swineflu under Helpful Materials.

Post signs at entrances to buildings and offices asking people who have a fever, plus a cough or sore throat, to avoid entering; these signs should be in all languages frequently used by clients.

If visits cannot be postponed, transmission can be reduced by one of the following: 1) give the client tissues and ask he or she to cough into the tissues, 2) ask the client to keep a distance of about 6 feet from others or 3) ask the client to wear a surgical mask during the visit.

5. Keep Supplies Accessible

Supplies, such as tissues, trash cans, soap, disinfectant wipes, surgical masks (when appropriate) and alcohol-based hand cleaners are strongly recommended to encourage healthy habits in the workplace and at home.

Alcohol-based hand cleaner and other supplies should be placed in locations that are accessible to clients and can be seen by staff.

6. When to Use Masks

Except in certain healthcare settings, the use of **N-95 respirators are not routinely recommended**. Surgical masks, placed on a coughing client, not the employee, may have limited usefulness in situations when appointments can't be delayed, client can't cooperate by using tissues to cover their cough, and employee and client can't be separated by 6 feet or more.