

Updated Guidance to Employers for Preventing Transmission Of New Flu Virus (H₁N₁) in the Workplace

Given the current level of concern over the new flu virus (H₁N₁) employers need to be prepared to take reasonable steps when employees and/or visitors are experiencing flu like symptoms.

At this time, we are dealing with a new type of flu whose symptoms appear to be similar to other common flu strains. Employers should be familiar with simple measures to reduce the risk of infection in the workplace and prepare for impact of illness on their operations.

Up-to-date information on the new flu virus (H₁N₁) can be found at the State of California Department of Public Health Toll-Free Hotline at 1-888-865-0564 and the Santa Clara County Public Health Department website www.sccphd.org

What is the new flu virus (H₁N₁)?

H₁N₁ flu is a respiratory infection caused by a new influenza virus. Although there have been reports of serious illness and death due to H₁N₁ flu in Mexico, most of the recently confirmed cases in the United States have been mild and no more serious than seasonal influenza.

How is the H₁N₁ flu virus spread?

Human transmission is thought to occur in the same way as seasonal flu: through respiratory droplets that are released when an infected person coughs or sneezes. These droplets can infect people in close proximity.

Who is at risk for the H₁N₁ flu?

Anyone who has contact with an infected person may be exposed to H₁N₁ flu. Influenza is most contagious while the infected person is experiencing fever and /or cough.

What are the symptoms of the H₁N₁ flu?

Symptoms appear to be similar to those of seasonal flu and usually include fever accompanied by cough, sore throat, stuffy nose and congestion. Many ill individuals affected also experience fatigue, headache, body aches, lethargy, or chills, and some affected people have reported diarrhea and vomiting.

What are tips for preventing illness in the workplace?

- **Most important:** remind employees that they should not come to work if they have flu symptoms. They should stay home for at least 7 days after symptoms first started, or until all your symptoms are gone, which ever is longer.
- Encourage employees to wash their hands before eating, after coughing or sneezing, after using the bathroom and any time hands are soiled. It is a good idea to avoid touching eyes, nose or mouth.
- If a workplace lacks soap and water, an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at 60% alcohol is an effective substitute. Good hand hygiene is the best protection against contact with the virus on surfaces or other people's hands.

What precautions can help prevent the spread of a flu virus in offices and public places?

No special precautions are needed, but building managers and owners should enforce good workplace hygiene practices:

- Make sure all hand washing facilities are equipped with adequate hand soap and paper towels.
- Clean surfaces that people touch often, such as doorknobs, door handles, handrails, shared PCs and telephones, as well as surfaces in bathrooms, cafeterias and offices.
- Advise employees and building visitors to wash their hands frequently, and to cover their coughs. Posting signs can be helpful, and signs are available for download at www.sccphd.org/panflu under Pandemic Information.
- There is currently no evidence to suggest that special vacuuming equipment or procedures are necessary. Upholstery, carpets, drapes and vertical surfaces don't require special cleaning unless they are visibly soiled.
- Keep all heating and ventilation systems in good working order in accordance with system specifications and any applicable regulations.

What should I tell employees who have flu-like symptoms?

Employees with flu-like symptoms should stay home. If they have a fever 100° F or higher and a cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, they should call your doctor or medical provider. Their doctor will decide if they should go in for an appointment to evaluate their illness.

Please download the following resources at: www.sccphd.org

- "What To Do If You Are Home with the Flu"
- "Home Care Guide"