

H1N1 (Swine) Flu: Information for Employers



What H1N1 swine flu?

Swine Flu or H1N1 Flu is a new type of flu virus that has started to make people sick in the United States and around the world. The symptoms of swine or H1N1 flu are much like the regular seasonal flu that causes illness in winter, including fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills, runny nose, and tiredness. Some people may have vomiting and diarrhea too.

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How does swine flu spread?

Swine flu is contagious. It spreads from person-to-person, just like regular seasonal flu. Flu virus spreads when a sick person coughs or sneezes near another person. The respiratory droplets that are created may contact a susceptible individual if he or she is within 6 feet of the coughing/sneezing person. Flu viruses may also be spread by contact with an environmental surface that has been recently contaminated by contact with a sick person. A person with the flu can spread germs from 1 day before to 7 days after getting sick.

What can employers do to prevent swine flu from affecting the workplace?

- Encourage employees to stay home when they are sick. This will help prevent spread of the flu to other people while at work.
- Promote hand-washing practices in the workplace. Make sure that soap and warm water are readily available. Make alcohol-based hand sanitizer available to staff, if access to hand-washing is limited.
- Maintain a clean environment. Make sure that frequently touched surfaces (railings, doorknobs) are cleaned often.

For more information, go to: www.phila.gov/health

How can an employer help determine if swine flu is affecting their workplace?

Employers should evaluate absenteeism in their workplace. If a higher rate of absenteeism is identified, absent employees should be contacted to determine the reason for their absence. If the cause of the increased absenteeism is determined to be due to flu, workplaces should contact the Philadelphia Department of Public Health for additional guidance, at 215-685-6742.

Should I prevent an employee returning from Mexico from coming to work? What about employees who have a family member suspected of having swine flu?

No. Employees who have traveled to an area of the world where swine flu is occurring, or who have an ill family member, may return to work. These individuals should monitor their health for 7 days after returning from the trip. If they become ill with influenza-like symptoms, including fever, body aches, runny nose, sore throat, and/or cough they should immediately: stay home from work, notify their employer, and contact their personal physician.

What else should I do?

Plan for the possibility of a flu pandemic. Think about how your workplace would function if many people were out sick, either caring for themselves or family members. Answer the following questions:

- What are the essential services your workplace provides in order to function? How can you provide those services if much of your workforce were absent at any given time?
- Do employees deal with the general public? Would they be at exposed to the flu if there were a lot of people sick in the community?
- Can I communicate with staff quickly and reliably in an emergency?
- Supplies and equipment when they may be scarce. Do you have access to all the supplies you need? Does your vendor? Is there an alternate supplier should one be needed?
- Workplace human resource policies. What are procedures regarding absenteeism? Are mechanisms in place to support employees to work off-site, if possible? Are there plans in place to extend work hours or coverage on a temporary basis?