



Nevada State Health Division  
Public Health Preparedness



## H1N1 Influenza (Swine Flu) Questions & Answers for Employers

**NOTE:** Throughout this document you will see the recommendation that a person with influenza-like illness/symptoms should remain home until 24 hours after symptoms have resolved. In certain circumstances, however, (e.g. health-care workers caring for immunosuppressed, etc.) a longer exclusion time might be appropriate.

### **Question - How can I reduce the risk of illness in the workplace?**

**Answer** - Remind employees they should not come to work if they have influenza-like symptoms (fever, cough and runny nose). An employee should stay home from work until 24 hours after influenza-like symptoms go away.

Encourage employees to avoid touching their eyes, noses or mouths; and to wash their hands before and after eating, after using the bathroom, and any time hands are soiled. Good hand hygiene is the best protection against infection and should always be practiced after contact with frequently-touched surfaces or other people's hands.

Have tissues available to employees and remind employees to cover their mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing with a tissue or when coughing/sneezing into their elbow. An employee should wash his/her hands immediately after coughing or sneezing. Visit <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/covercough.htm> and print off the Cover Your Cough poster and display it around your office as a friendly reminder. Or visit [www.flu.gov](http://www.flu.gov).

### **Question - What should I use to clean surfaces?**

**Answer** - The novel H1N1 flu virus can be killed with common household or commercial detergents and disinfectants. Use general household cleaners or soap and water. As an added precaution, disinfectants can be used on frequently-touched surfaces.

- If hard surfaces are visibly dirty, clean first using general cleaner or soap and water. After surface has been cleaned, apply disinfectant following product instructions.
- Disinfectant wipes can be used to clean small surfaces. Discard wipes after using them.
- If disinfectants are not available, use a chlorine bleach solution made by adding 1 tablespoon of bleach to a quart (4 cups) of water. Discard the solution after using it.

**(NOTE: Never mix bleach with cleaning products – you may create hazardous vapors.)**



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Additional information on registered disinfectants and antimicrobial products is available at [www.epa.gov/oppad001/influenza-disinfectants.html](http://www.epa.gov/oppad001/influenza-disinfectants.html) or [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) or [www.flu.gov](http://www.flu.gov)

**Question - What should I tell employees who have influenza-like symptoms?**

**Answer** - Employees with flu-like symptoms, such as fever (temperature at or above 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit), cough and runny nose, should stay home until at least 24 hours after their symptoms resolve. Anyone with *severe* symptoms should seek health care and treatment immediately.

In adults, symptoms that warrant emergency medical attention include:

- Rapid breathing, difficulty breathing, or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Bluish skin color

Those with mild flu-like illness should *not* go to the emergency room or hospital. Those with flulike illness who have underlying conditions should call a doctor to get treatment.

**Question - How long should employees with influenza-like illness remain home from work?**

**Answer** - An employee should stay home until he/she has been free of symptoms for 24 hours. If appropriate, employers might consider having telecommuting options for those who need to stay home.

**Question - What should an employer do if an employee comes to work with influenza-like illness symptoms?**

**Answer** - Send the employee home and instruct them to remain home until they have been symptom-free for 24 hours.

**Question - What should an employer do for co-workers who may have been exposed to an employee who is a suspect or confirmed case of novel H1N1 flu?**

**Answer** - Inform employees of their exposure to the virus. Have exposed employees monitor their own signs and symptoms. **If an employee becomes ill while at work...have them go home.** Instruct them not to return to work until they are symptom-free for 24 hours.



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**Question - What precautions can help prevent the spread of the H1N1 influenza in offices and public places?**

**Answer** – Building managers and owners should enforce good maintenance practices:

- Stock hand-washing facilities with soap and paper towels, and clean them regularly. Keep sinks, faucets, drains, toilets and plumbing in good working order. Provide wastebaskets for the used tissues and towels, and empty them regularly.
- Routinely clean frequently-touched surfaces such as doorknobs, door handles, common keyboards, handrails and telephones, as well as surfaces in bathrooms, cafeterias, and offices.
- Keep heating and ventilation systems in good working order, in accordance with system specifications and any applicable regulations.
- Post signs advising employees and visitors to wash their hands frequently and to cover their coughs. Educational materials are available at the following web sites:

[www.flu.gov](http://www.flu.gov)

[www.cdc.gov/flu/workplace](http://www.cdc.gov/flu/workplace)

**Question - Should I have medications on hand for employees?**

**Answer** - No. The antiviral medicines such as Tamiflu ® (oseltamivir) and Relenza ® (zanamivir) are only available by prescription and should only be taken by those to whom they are prescribed and should be taken as instructed by the doctor. Antiviral medicines can help alleviate H1N1 flu symptoms in those with severe illness or risk factors for complications from influenza. Most influenza lasts only a few days, and most people recover completely without medication, so most patients should use it only if their doctor recommends it.

**Question - Should employees with influenza-like symptoms get tested when they get sick or before returning to work?**

**Answer** - There is no need for people with mild flu symptoms to be tested for flu or for the novel H1N1 flu virus. Testing does not affect treatment or medical advice. Employees who are feeling well can return to work 24 hours after symptoms resolve. There is no need to test them for an absence of influenza.

**Question - Should employees who have been exposed to the novel H1N1 flu be excluded from work?**

**Answer** – No. Not unless an employee is experiencing influenza-like illness (fever, cough,

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If you are ill see your doctor or health care provider.

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running nose). If an employee is feeling well when he/she comes to work and later starts experiencing influenza-like illness, have the employee go home immediately.

**Question - Should workers wear masks to prevent the spread of the H1N1 flu?**

**Answer** - No. Workers in general workplace settings (offices, stores, restaurants, manufacturing plants) do not need to wear masks. But any worker with flu-like illness should stay home until 24 hours after their symptoms resolve. Obviously, staff caring for known or suspect H1N1 patients should use appropriate PPE.

**Question - Should companies restrict business travel to prevent H1N1 influenza?**

**Answer** - It is not necessary to restrict business travel. But advise travelers to take extra precautions while traveling to avoid getting sick, such as: practice good hand hygiene and avoid others who are sick.

**Question - How can I plan ahead for a pandemic?**

**Answer** - Think about how you would run your business if a large share of your workforce was absent. Consider the impact that school closures could have and make contingency plans, such as allowing telecommuting or staggered shifts. You should also review your sick-leave policies and consider how they would affect employees who become ill.

**Question - Where should I go for more information?**

**Answer** - For more information on how businesses can plan for large disease outbreaks, visit the following websites:

[www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/workplaceplanning/index.html](http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/workplaceplanning/index.html)

[www.flu.gov](http://www.flu.gov)

[www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

[www.health.nv.gov](http://www.health.nv.gov)