

H1N1 Pandemic Flu – What Workers and Their Unions Need to Know

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What Is a Flu Pandemic?

- **A pandemic is a global disease outbreak**
- **An influenza pandemic occurs when a new flu virus emerges, causes illness, and spreads easily person-to-person worldwide**
- **We are now in the midst of a pandemic of the H1N1 (swine) flu**

Seasonal Flu vs. H1N1 Flu

- **The H1N1 flu is very different from the seasonal flu.**
- **Seasonal flu is a common sickness every winter. It can usually be prevented by a vaccine.**
- **Many people can fight off seasonal flu because over time, they build up some immunity that protects them.**
- **The people most at risk from seasonal flu are young children, older people, and people with any health condition that weakens the immune system.**

Who is Most Susceptible to (More Likely to Catch) the H1N1 Flu?

- **Healthy individuals appear to be as much at risk of contracting the H1N1 flu as anyone else.**
- **H1N1 flu disproportionately attacks children and young adults.**
- **People 65 and older seem to have a low risk of H1N1 infection.**
- **Some people have increased risk of complications if they catch the flu.**

Who is at Increased Risk of Developing Flu-Related Complications?

- **Children younger than 5, but especially children younger than 2**
- **Adults 65 years of age and older**
- **Pregnant women**
- **People who have certain medical conditions like asthma, diabetes, neurological disorders, chronic lung disease, heart disease, weakened immune system**

The H1N1 Vaccine

- **A vaccine for H1N1 flu is being distributed. There is a limited amount available.**
- **The vaccine is being purchased by the federal government. The plan is to buy at least 250 million doses of vaccine.**
- **The vaccine is being distributed through the states based on population. States are responsible for designating public and private providers to whom the vaccine will go.**
- **The vaccine for H1N1 is different from the seasonal flu vaccine. People have to get both vaccines to get protection against these two different kinds of flu.**

Who Should Get the H1N1 Vaccine

- **Pregnant women**
- **People who live with or care for infants younger than 6 months of age (because younger infants are at higher risk of influenza-related complications and cannot be vaccinated)**
- **Healthcare and emergency medical personnel**
- **Children and young people aged 6 months through 24 years**
- **People between 25 and 64 years who have chronic medical conditions**
- **As more vaccine becomes available, the rest of the population**

The Two Kinds of H1N1 Vaccine

- **The nasal spray and the flu shot**
- **With either vaccine, children up to nine years old should get two doses of vaccine, about a month apart**
- **Older children and adults need only one dose**
- **People who have a severe (life-threatening) allergy to eggs should not get either vaccine**
- **After you get the flu vaccine, it takes around two weeks for your body to develop immunity**

Nasal Spray Vaccine

- **A “live, attenuated” vaccine that is sprayed into the nose**
- **“Attenuated” means it is weakened, so it will not cause illness**
- **Approved only for healthy people (people with no history of major health problems), between the ages of 2 and 49**

Flu Shot

- **An inactivated vaccine, meaning it has killed virus in it**
- **Recommended for:**
 - **Pregnant women**
 - **People who live with or care for infants younger than six months of age**
 - **Health care and emergency medical personnel**
 - **Anyone from 6 months through 24 years of age**
 - **Anyone from 25 – 64 years of age with certain chronic medical conditions or a weakened immune system**
- **As more vaccine becomes available, also for:**
 - **Health adults 25 through 64 years old**
 - **Adults 65 years or older**

Should Employers Be Allowed to Force Health Care Workers to Get the H1N1 Vaccine?

- **Union position is no**
- **Lots of evidence that voluntary vaccination programs with strong educational component are effective**
- **Flu vaccines are less than 100% effective; still need good infection control practices**
- **Some health care employers are requiring vaccine and then not implementing appropriate infection control**

Symptoms of H1N1 Flu

- fever
- runny nose
- sore throat
- cough
- body aches
- headache
- chills
- fatigue
- nausea
- diarrhea
- vomiting

What You Should Do If You Think You Have the H1N1 Flu

- **Stay home from work or school until at least 24 hours after your fever has ended, or if you have not had a fever, until at least 24 hours after all symptoms have ended.**
- **Avoid contact with other people as much as possible to keep from spreading your illness to others.**
- **Contact your health care provider.**
- **People infected with H1N1 influenza are potentially contagious from the day before the start of symptoms until they are no longer symptomatic, and possibly for up to 7 days following the start of symptoms. Children, especially younger children, might be contagious for longer periods.**

Antiviral Medications

- **There are prescription anti-viral medications your health care provider can prescribe once you become ill.**
- **These drugs work best if taken within 2 days of becoming ill.**
- **Two that are most effective against H1N1 are Tamiflu and Relenza.**

Routes of Transmission: How The H1N1 Flu is Spread

- **Droplet transmission**
- **Airborne transmission**
- **Contact transmission**

Droplet Transmission

- **A person can catch the virus when an infected individual near them (usually within six feet) coughs, sneezes or even talks.**
- **Large droplets containing the virus can infect a person when the droplets come into direct contact with the person's nose, mouth and eyes.**

Airborne Transmission

- **A person can catch the virus when an infected individual coughs or sneezes and small droplets/particles containing the virus remain suspended in the air.**
- **These droplets/particles are small enough to be breathed in by a person.**
- **We do not know how far these small droplets can travel or how long they can last suspended in the air.**
- **Someone could get infected by breathing in the small droplets/particles even though they are not in close proximity to an infected individual.**

Contact Transmission

- **A person can catch the virus when they touch an infected individual or an object or surface that is contaminated with the virus and then touch their own mouth, eyes, or nose.**
- **It is not known exactly how long the flu virus can live for on nonporous surfaces like handrails, doorknobs, tables, and desks – some sources say 24 to 48 hours.**

How Can Influenza Spread?



Some Ways to Protect Yourself from Catching the H1N1 Flu

- **Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you sneeze**
- **Wash your hands often**
- **Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth**
- **Avoid shaking hands (and always wash your hands after physical contact with others)**
- **Try to avoid close contact with sick people**
- **Avoid or minimize time in crowded settings and other situations that increase risk of being exposed to someone who may be infected**

Which Workers are Most at Risk of Being Exposed to H1N1 Flu on the Job

- Risk of exposure depends on:
 - whether you work near people who are potentially infected with the H1N1 virus, and
 - whether you have repeated or extended contact with people who may have the virus (such as coworkers, the general public, outpatients, or school children)
- *The higher the risk, the more protection employers should provide for workers*

Levels of Risk of and Types of Jobs

- **Very high exposure risk jobs and high exposure risk jobs - high potential for exposure to known or suspected sources of pandemic influenza virus; mostly health care and emergency services workers**
- **Medium exposure risk jobs - require frequent contact with the general population; like workers in high population density work environments, schools, correctional institutions, airplanes, high volume retail, social service**
- **Lower exposure risk jobs - do not require contact with people known to be infected with the H1N1 virus, nor frequent contact with the public; like office employees**

Employer Legal Responsibility to Protect Workers from H1N1 on the Job

- Under the OSHA law, it is the employer's responsibility to provide a safe and healthy workplace, which includes protecting workers from H1N1.
- In November 2009, OSHA issued a “compliance directive” which applies to H1N1 exposure in healthcare settings.
 - See http://www.osha.gov/OshDoc/Directive_pdf/CPL_02_02-075.pdf.
 - Purpose is to ensure health care employers use proper controls to protect workers. OSHA will cite healthcare employers under general duty clause of OSHA law.
- There are also specific OSHA standards on respirators and on personal protective equipment.
- And there are voluntary guidelines/recommendations for employers from OSHA and CDC (Centers for Disease Control).

Every Workplace Should Have a Plan for Pandemic Flu in Effect NOW

- **Since the H1N1 flu is currently spreading around the U.S., now is the time for employers to have workplace exposure control measures and emergency plans in place so that workers are protected**
- **Unfortunately, most of our workplaces are not adequately prepared**

What the Union Should Do

- **Workers and their unions should be involved in developing and implementing any emergency preparedness plan, including a plan for H1N1 flu.**
- **Unions need to review the employer's safety and health program to see whether it adequately deals with pandemic flu.**

Unions Should Ask the Employer:

- **What kind of risk assessment has been done to determine employee exposure risk?**
- **What is the employer's plan to protect workers?**

Components of a Workplace “Exposure Control Program” for Pandemic Flu

- 1. Develop a written exposure control plan**
- 2. Decide on and implement the most effective ways to control spread of the virus**
- 3. Monitor workers’ health**
- 4. Train workers**
- 5. Post warning signs and labels**
- 6. Keep the workplace clean**
- 7. Keep good worker medical records**

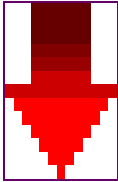
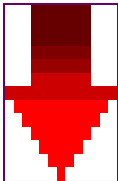
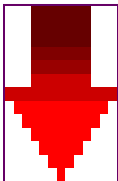
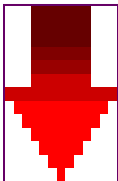
1. Develop a Written Exposure Plan

- **An exposure control plan is a written plan that identifies:**
 - **Workers who are more likely to be exposed to the virus,**
 - **Activities and locations in a workplace that could expose workers to the virus,**
 - **Ways for finding out if a worker has come into contact with the virus, and**
 - **Guidelines for putting the infection control plan into action.**

2. Decide on and Implement Most Effective Ways to Control Spread of the Virus

- **Follow “hierarchy of controls”**
- **Using engineering controls is the best way to control the spread of the virus; this is followed by safe work practices, administrative controls, and personal protective equipment.**

Hierarchy of Controls for Pandemic Flu

<p><i>Most effective</i></p> 	<i>Control Methods</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Flu-related examples</i>
	Engineering Controls	Modify the workplace to reduce worker exposure to the hazard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ventilation • Sneeze/cough guards • Distance between people
	Work Practices and Administrative Controls	Modify how work is done	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infection control • Training • Leave policies and scheduling
<p><i>Least effective</i></p> 	Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)	Protective equipment worn by workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gloves • Disposable clothing • N95 or more protective respirators

Usually a combination of control methods is needed to provide the best protection to workers

(A vaccine is an important way to protect workers)

Surgical Masks vs. Respirators

- **Surgical masks are not respirators and will not prevent you from breathing in the flu virus (from airborne transmission).**
- **There is some evidence that surgical masks may provide limited protection from another way infection can happen - from droplet transmission.**

What Surgical Masks Look Like



Respirators

- **The only personal protective equipment that may protect you from breathing in the virus – from airborne transmission – is a respirator.**
- **Surgical masks are not respirators (although they may look like some respirators).**
- **To protect workers and others from the flu, a “particulate filtering respirator” rated “N95” or higher is needed.**
- **If you have to wear one at work, it must be provided by the employer.**

What Respirators Look Like

Disposable



Reusable Elastomeric - Half Face Piece





***PAPRS (Powered air
purifying
respirators)***



Components of a Workplace “Exposure Control Program” for Pandemic Flu

- 1. Develop a written exposure control plan**
- 2. Decide on best, most effective ways to control spread of the virus**
- 3. Monitor workers’ health**
- 4. Train workers**
- 5. Post warning signs and labels**
- 6. Keep the workplace clean**
- 7. Keep good worker medical records**

3. Monitor Workers' Health

- **Set up a medical surveillance program:**
 - **How to recognize symptoms of pandemic flu virus,**
 - **How to identify workers who may be sick with the flu,**
 - **Steps to take with infected workers, and**
 - **Rules for giving out available medicines.**

4. Train Workers (and Management)

- **Training should include information on:**
 - **Ways to catch the virus at work,**
 - **Symptoms of pandemic flu,**
 - **Methods to prevent the flu virus from spreading (“controls”),**
 - **Medical surveillance program to monitor workers’ health, and**
 - **OSHA’s Respiratory Protection Standard and Compliance Directive on H1N1 (where applicable).**

5. Post Warning Signs and Labels

- **Post warning signs and labels that tell workers where they can come into contact with the virus.**
- **Signs and labels should also explain how workers can protect themselves from exposure.**

6. Keep the Workplace Clean

- **Should have a program for cleaning and disinfecting equipment and surfaces that could be contaminated.**
- **Program should also have guidelines for handling and throwing away contaminated waste.**

7. Keep Good Medical Records

- **Employers should keep records of how they have followed workers' health (medical surveillance).**
- **Detailed records should be kept on each worker who becomes infected with the pandemic flu virus – how they got it and where.**
- **Employers must allow workers and their unions to see and have copies of these records under OSHA's Standard 1910.1020.**

Other Pandemic Flu Workplace Policies That Should Be In Place

- **Paid sick leave**
- **Paid family leave**
- **No pressure to come to work when sick**
- **No punishment for staying home for own sickness or sickness of family member**
- **Work from home when possible**
- **Work shift flexibility**
- **Elimination of unnecessary travel**

Union Bargaining Over H1N1 Plans and Policies

- **Unions have a legal right to bargain over safety and health**
- **Unions should use this right and demand that the employer bargain over protecting workers from H1N1**

Websites on H1N1 Influenza

- **OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) -**
www.osha.gov/dsg/topics/pandemicflu/index.html
- **CDC (Centers for Disease Control) -**
www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu
- **NIOSH (National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health) -**
www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/H1N1flu
- **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services**
<http://www.flu.gov>
- **State Health Department Websites -**
www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/states.htm

What Can We Do?

- **Be informed**
- **Be prepared**
- **Review employers' H1N1 plan and procedures**
- **Negotiate to ensure workers are protected**