

Communicating with Employees About Swine Flu

May 1, 2009

No doubt you have been following the news about swine influenza (influenza A (H1N1)) and have heard that the World Health Organization has raised its pandemic alert level. If you haven't communicated with employees already, a good first step is to provide employees with basic information about swine flu and let them know that your organization is actively monitoring the situation and will alert employees if the situation escalates.

Here is some basic information to communicate to employees as soon as possible.

What are the symptoms of swine flu?

The symptoms of swine flu are similar to those of regular flu, including fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Swine flu can vary in severity from mild to severe.

Anyone who is experiencing a fever above 100 degrees F (37.8 C) and a cough or sore throat and who has recently traveled in Mexico, southern California, southern Texas or other areas with confirmed cases of swine flu—or who has recently had contact with someone who is ill and has traveled to those areas—should seek medical attention.

If I have symptoms of swine flu, what should I do?

Swine flu can be treated with viral drugs to minimize symptoms, particularly within two days of onset. If you or your family needs medical attention, contact your primary care physician right away. Before going to your

physician or other health facility, contact them to report your symptoms and let explain why you think you have swine flu (for example, if you have recently traveled to a country where there is an outbreak in humans or you have been exposed to a co-worker who has the flu). Follow the advice given to you. If it is not possible to contact your healthcare provider in advance, communicate your suspicion of infection as soon as you arrive at the facility.

If you experience symptoms, you should not come to work, but should alert your supervisor. We know this is a busy time for everyone, but now more than ever, we need to consider the health of all employees and their families.

How long can an infected person spread swine flu to others?

A person is infectious as long as there are symptoms and for up to 7 days following onset of these symptoms. Children, especially young children, may be potentially contagious for even longer.

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What medicines are available to treat swine flu?

The CDC says two flu drugs, Tamiflu and Relenza, seem effective against the new strain. These antiviral drugs fight against the flu by keeping flu viruses from reproducing in your body.

Is there a vaccine for swine flu?

There is no vaccine available right now to protect against swine flu.

What can I do to prevent catching or spreading this flu virus?

Everyone should follow these common sense measures to help prevent the spread of swine flu (or any flu virus):

- Wash your hands with soap and water frequently or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, and throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth with your hands, since they pick up viruses from surfaces you touch.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- Practice good health habits including adequate sleep, eating nutritious food, and keeping physically active.

If a family member shows symptoms of swine flu, what should I do?

- First, seek immediate medical attention from your primary care physician or urgent/emergency care.
- Separate the sick family member from others.
- Cover your mouth and nose when caring for the person.
- Wash your hands with soap and water thoroughly after each contact.
- Improve the air flow where the sick family member stays. Use doors and windows to take advantage of breezes.
- Keep the environment clean with readily available household cleaning agents.

Can I catch swine flu from eating pork products?

No. Swine flu cannot be transmitted by eating pork products. Plus, heat commonly used in cooking meat (e.g. 160°F core temperature) will readily inactivate any viruses potentially present in raw meat products.

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