



fast facts

advancing safety, health, and workplace rights in the legislative branch

Pandemic Flu: Swine Flu

June 2009



There is a potential pandemic threat from the Swine Flu Virus, which is also known as the H1N1 Influenza Virus. Swine Flu is a respiratory disease normally found in pigs; however the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has confirmed that the H1N1 virus is spreading from human to human. An influenza pandemic occurs when a new influenza virus emerges for which there is little or no immunity in the human population. The symptoms for Swine Flu are similar to the seasonal flu and include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, chills and fatigue. Health professionals are concerned about the possibility that this virus could cause an influenza pandemic for the following reasons:

- It is a combination of human and swine influenza viruses never before seen.
- The age group most affected is healthy, young adults usually under 25 (unlike seasonal flu).
- Pregnant women are at increased risk of complications
- Many people have no immunity to the flu produced by the virus.
- Deaths seem to be occurring in people with underlying health conditions that existed before the onset of the infection.
- Like other influenza viruses, it continues to evolve.

Cause for Concern

The CDC is predicting that the number of H1N1 infections will increase during the 2009-2010 Winter Flu Season and is encouraging vigilance to control the spread of the virus. A Swine Flu vaccine is currently being developed and may be available before the start of the Winter Flu Season. According to the CDC, Oseltamirvir (Tamiflu) and Zanamivir (Relenza) are currently being used for both the treatment and prevention of Swine Flu.

At this time, the current strain of the H1N1 virus has not caused influenza as deadly as first anticipated. This lack of severity caused the World Health Organization (WHO) to consider whether mortality rates should be taken into account prior to declaring a Phase 6 Pandemic -- the highest level indicating that a global pandemic is underway. After conferring with leading influenza experts, virologists and public health officials, WHO recently decided that the scientific criteria for an influenza pandemic have been met and declared a Phase 6 Pandemic alert. Further spread of the virus is considered inevitable. WHO officials cautioned that past experiences have shown that severity can vary depending on many factors from one country to another. Factors such as the age group most susceptible to a particular viral strain, and the geographical distribution of the disease might also determine the severity.

Health care officials are concerned that the current strain of the H1N1 virus may evolve into a more deadly strain during the next wave. The 1918 Flu Pandemic was caused by a strain of the H1N1 virus. The 1918 influenza pandemic was the most deadly disease outbreak in history. An estimated 25 to 30 percent of the 1.8 billion people in the world became ill. At least 25-50 million of those infected died in less than a year, including over 500,000 Americans. The first wave of the 1918 pandemic was not as deadly as the second wave.

Be Vigilant

Legislative Branch employees can take steps to minimize transmission of the virus. All employees should follow basic hygiene practices to prevent illness. Hand washing is an important way to reduce exposure to common infectious diseases. Cleaning hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds removes potentially infectious material from the skin. Hands should be cleaned before preparing food, eating, or touching one's face, and after handling soiled material (e.g., used tissues, lavatory surfaces), coughing or sneezing, and using the toilet. Waterless alcohol-based hand gels may be used when soap is not available. Employees who are exhibiting flu like symptoms should not go to work, or, if they arrive ill, should be sent home. If they become ill on the job, employees should do the following:

- Cover mouth and nose with a tissue or shirt sleeve when coughing or sneezing (avoid coughing or sneezing into hands).
- Put used tissue in a wastebasket.
- Go home as soon as practical.
- Clean hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand gel immediately after coughing or sneezing.
- Avoid close contact with coworkers (social distancing).

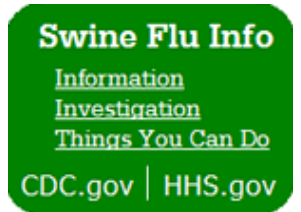
Be Prepared

A pandemic outbreak of Swine Flu or any other influenza would immediately affect employees and workplace operations. Planning for this type of emergency will help protect the health and safety of Legislative Branch employees and will assist in maintaining critical operations.

Each Employing Office should develop its own emergency plan. The plan should take into consideration visitors received in various areas of the campus each year as well as assigning roles and responsibilities to employees that will ensure continuity of operations. Telephone lists should be updated to include home and emergency contact information for employees, office emergency numbers, attending physician or health unit numbers, and the Capitol Police emergency number. Annunciators, an electrically controlled signal board or indicator, should be periodically inspected in each area to ensure that they are functional and ready to receive information. A copy of the plan should be readily available to those who will be responsible for implementation.

Updated Information

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website provides updated information about the Swine Flu outbreak including the number and location of cases throughout the United States. Daily updates, press briefings, guidance documents and travel notices are a few of the items provided. Guidance documents include: Patient Care, Antiviral Recommendations as well as Face Mask and Respiratory protection recommendations. These guides can help Congressional offices identify exposure and health risk levels in workplace settings.



Workplace Planning

Consider the following when planning for an outbreak in the workplace:

- Identify necessary operating functions for continuity of operations
- Determine essential and non essential personnel
- Prepare succession strategy to account for absenteeism
- Assess equipment requirements
- Consider telecommuting possibilities
- Evaluate computer/server requirements and upkeep
- Ensure the safety and health of employees while at work
- Communicate with employees away from the job
- Plan for payroll, benefit and other human resource functions
- Verify pandemic information on and off campus
- Prepare for change in patterns of commerce including interrupted supply delivery
- Consider how to handle emergencies during a pandemic outbreak
- Organize recordkeeping attendance, statistics e.g. that reflect pandemic impact

Sustaining the workplace during an outbreak:

- Prepare and implement an effective pandemic plan
- Communicate with appropriate agencies regarding the status of the pandemic
- Train employees and conduct table top exercises at all levels of the organization
- Coordinate with appropriate local authorities
- Protect employees who are required to report to work
- Provide updated information regarding medical services available to employees who report to work and become ill
- Ensure that ill employees receive care and arrive at their destinations safely
- Plan for and provide Personal Protective Equipment
- Store and maintain necessary equipment and supplies

Visit the following CDC websites for additional information:

- * Cover Your Cough www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/covercough.htm
- * Clean Hands Save Lives www.cdc.gov/cleanhands

Fast Stats

Section 215 of the Congressional Accountability Act, 2 U.C.S. §1341

OSHA Act § 5(a)(1). The “General Duty” clause is not a specific standard, but has been applied by OSHA as a catchall regulation to require employers to maintain a workplace free of recognized hazards. 29 C.F.R. § 1903.1

New OSHA Fact Sheets: ‘What Employers Can Do to Protect Workers from Pandemic Influenza’, ‘Respirators versus Surgical Mask’ and a Quick Card: ‘How to Protect Yourself in the Workplace during a Pandemic’

OSHA publications: <http://www.osha.gov/dsg/topics/pandemicflu/index/html>

- Pandemic Preparedness and Response Guidance For Healthcare Workers and Healthcare Employers
- Proposed Guidance On Workplace Stockpiling of Respirators and Facemasks for Pandemic Influenza
- Guidance on Preparing Workplaces for an Influenza Pandemic

Agencies to Reference for information and updates:

Office of Attending Physician (OAP) is an on-site source for reliable medical information. The OAP website <http://attendingphysician.house.gov> on the U.S. House of Representatives intranet provides Pandemic Flu updates and recommendations on basic hygiene and social distancing procedures. Note: This website may not be accessible to all employing offices.

U.S. Government access to avian and pandemic flu information

www.pandemicflu.gov

State and local Public Health departments provide local guidance and information

The World Health Organization (WHO)

www.who.int/en

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

The CDC Daily Report contains public health information regarding activities in North America

www.cdc.gov/swineflu

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)

www.fema.gov/emergency/reports/index.shtm



Peter Ames Eveleth
General Counsel

Mary-Margaret Smith
Editor

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the Office of Compliance:

Room LA 200, John Adams Building
110 Second Street, SE
Washington, D.C. 20540
t/ 202-724-9250
tdd/ 202-426-1912
f/ 202-426-1913

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