

Safety ALERT

Workplace Recommendations for Swine Flu Prevention

Influenza A, Swine Flu, H1N1 – different names for the same disease that many of us may become all too familiar with this flu season. The Center for Disease Control (CDC), the World Health Organization (WHO), and other health organizations are warning of a potential pandemic flue event that could affect millions of people throughout the world.

So why the concern? In a typical flu season in the US approximately 200,000 people are hospitalized and 36,000 people die – the majority of these occur in adults over the age of 65 and in children under 5 years of age. The H1N1 flu has the potential to be much worse and to affect younger adults who normally would not be at high risk. As of October 2, 2009, 27 states have reported widespread influenza activity with doctor visits and hospitalizations at higher levels than normal for this time of year.

Symptoms of H1N1 include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills, and fatigue. In addition, vomiting (25%) and diarrhea (25%) have been reported at a higher rate than for seasonal flu.

What can employers do to help protect their workers? First, encourage sick employees to stay home. The CDC recommends that workers stay home for 7 days after their symptoms start or until they've been symptom free for 24 hours without medication. Additional steps include:

- Promote frequent hand washing among workers with soap and water for 15 to 20 seconds or with alcohol based hand sanitizers.
- Provide staff with hand sanitizers if needed.
- Inform employees about the H1N1 virus and recommendations if they become sick, for returning to work and how to prevent the spread of the virus in the workplace.

- Institute regular disinfection of common use areas such as bathrooms, lunchrooms and work areas.

Employees should monitor their own health and stay home if they become ill. Employees should consult their own doctor about receiving flu vaccines, both the seasonal flu vaccine as well as the new H1N1 vaccine. Wash your hands frequently and cough or sneeze into your sleeve or a tissue to avoid spreading the disease. Keep yourself informed on the latest information from a reliable source such as the CDC.

For further information visit the CDC's H1N1 website at <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/update.htm> or contact Tim Rack of BSG at 732-751-0799 or track@birdsall.com.

