

## **Flu Facts: What Can You Do?**

### **What is it?**

Annually, the seasonal influenza virus affects millions of Americans. An estimated 60 million people in the US suffer from mild to severe cases of influenza that affect the respiratory system. The most severe medical complications often occur in the following groups: age 65+ individuals, children under 5 yrs of age, and adults with certain chronic medical conditions. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) annually oversee the development and availability of vaccine to protect people from getting the seasonal flu. The CDC is encouraging the seasonal flu vaccine be administered to prevent the three (3) main seasonal flu strains that research shows will most likely cause illness this fall and winter.

Since April of 2009 the Novel H1N1 influenza virus (also commonly referred to as Swine Flu) has touched hundreds of thousands of people worldwide and countless businesses, schools, and governments. The epidemic, which claimed as many as 81 lives in Mexico, resulted in many disruptions to daily life (transportation interruptions, work and school closures, food supplies threatened, and critical medical service and supply shortages). The CDC estimate about 1.5 million cases of H1N1 have been confirmed in the US in 2009. This new flu strain spread rapidly across the globe. It was this quick spreading pace that caused the Novel H1N1 classification as a pandemic - not because of its severity or high rate of mortality. Currently, CDC officials are no longer tracking the cases but closely monitoring and reporting on fatalities and cases requiring hospitalization.

### **How is it spread?**

Influenza viruses, seasonal or Novel H1N1, typically spread in very tiny droplets caused by coughing or sneezing. Basically, the virus needs to pass through the air and enter your body through your nose, mouth, or the mucous membranes of your eyes. The seasonal flu and Novel H1N1 have similar presenting symptoms; only a healthcare professional can determine the difference through additional medical testing. Influenza activity in the U.S. is typically monitored from October through mid-May with most influenza cases reported in January and February.

### **What can you do?**

The possibility of a Novel H1N1 influenza outbreak is extremely difficult to predict. Your local and state public health officials will have current CDC and DHHS (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services) recommendations for businesses, schools, and general public as the flu season advances. To minimize the disruption to your business activities and provide for the protection of the health and safety of you and your employees, you should consider preparing a plan. Proper personal hygiene (cover your cough or sneeze, wash hands frequently, and limit hand contact to eyes/nose/mouth) and keeping sick people away from well people are the most important mitigation strategies.

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### **As a business...**

Employers should begin now to develop a basic plan to include response to a flu outbreak in two scenarios, **a.) current level and not worse than the influenza outbreak of Spring/ Summer 2009;** **b.) a more severe and widespread outbreak.** Plans should give consideration to include for the severity of the disease (cases of hospitalization and death), extent of disease (number of sick persons as monitored through public health officials or worker absenteeism), and support service disruptions (school, daycare, or public transportation cancellation).

- **Review attendance, pay, travel and telecommuting policies** – Is your current leave policy flexible, non-punitive, and well-known throughout the organization? Can employees work from home if they experience symptoms or must care for sick family members? Do you have flexible scheduling to allow non-traditional accommodations in the event of school/day-care closures? Do your employees travel and are they aware of medical services available in that region should they fall ill?
- **Communications** – Are key organizations, suppliers, vendors, and customers aware of the business status in the absence of key personnel? Do your employees know plans and expectations in the event of workplace disruptions?
- **Business Continuity** – Are essential functions and critical business operations identified? Are contingency plans in place should there be high rate of absenteeism?

### **As an employee...**

Remember, the Novel H1N1 is a new flu virus and most people do not have any immunity to this infection. Please remind your employees (and their families) about these quick and easy steps to help stop the spread of Novel H1N1.

- **Cover your coughs and sneezes with tissue and dispose.** If no tissue, sneeze or cough into your elbow using your upper sleeve.
- **Wash hands thoroughly and frequently with soap and water and avoid touching eyes, nose, or mouth.** The use of alcohol based hand sanitizer is recommended, especially after sneezing and coughing.
- **Sharing of coworker tools and equipment (i.e. telephones, computers, desks, etc) should be discouraged, if not eliminated.** Commonly used/frequently touched surfaces should be cleaned and sanitized frequently.
- **Stay home if you have flu-like illness (fever or chills, AND cough or sore throat) and call your health-care provider to discuss your specific symptoms.** The CDC also recommend workers stay home until they are fever-free for at least 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medication.

### ***In Summary***

MANTEC, Inc can provide resources or information to your business to begin planning now on how to best prepare business continuity strategies and plans to respond to influenza outbreaks in the community. Additional resources, complete influenza updates, trends and recommendations can be found at the links below. Call your District Manager at (717) 843-5054 to learn more.

### ***Additional Resources***

- [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) – Center for Disease Control
- [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org) – American Red Cross
- [www.dhs.gov](http://www.dhs.gov) – Dept. of Homeland Security
- [www.who.int/en/](http://www.who.int/en/) - World Health Organization
- [www.flu.gov](http://www.flu.gov) – US Department of Health and Human Services
- [www.osha.gov](http://www.osha.gov) – Occupational Safety and Health Administration
- [www.H1N1inPA.com](http://www.H1N1inPA.com) – PA Dept. of Health
- [www.pasbdc.org](http://www.pasbdc.org) – PA Small Business Dev. Corp.
- [www.sba.gov](http://www.sba.gov) – Small Business Administration