

# H1N1

H1N1 Influenza Management in Hotels

Fall 2009

## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
What is H1N1 influenza? .....	3
Symptoms of H1N1 flu .....	3
Treatment of H1N1 flu .....	4
Treatment of H1N1 flu symptoms .....	5
How to protect yourself and others against H1N1 flu.....	5
<b>Hotel Response Plan</b>	<b>6</b>
Introduction and discussion topics.....	6
Training.....	6
Sanitation and hygiene .....	7
Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).....	7
<b>Employee Safety</b>	<b>8</b>
Role of Human Resources department .....	8
What to do if an employee is sick .....	9
What employees should do if sick or begin to exhibit symptoms at work .....	9
<b>If A Guest Is Sick</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Guest Room Decontamination</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Food and H1N1 Flu</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Communications With Guests and Employees</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Severe Pandemic Flu Planning</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Additional Internet Resources: AH&amp;LA and Federal, State Government Resources</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Sample Guest Letter About H1N1 Outbreak</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Sample Press Release</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Sample Employee Communication About H1N1 Risks</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Sample Employee Communication if Other Employees/Guests Have Reported H1N1</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Common Hotel Areas To Be Decontaminated</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>H1N1 Flu Concerns: Employee Questions-and-Answers</b>	<b>23</b>

## Introduction

This plan is designed to assist you with your management of any potential H1N1 influenza outbreak in your lodging business among employees and guests.

This document is a generalized template for informational purposes only and cannot be used as-is for any particular hotel. Any final plan must take into account the nature and configuration of the property, the nature and configuration of the local outbreak and available resources, local and state laws, personnel availability, food and water sources and a myriad of other specific considerations. AH&LA makes no warranty whatsoever concerning the accuracy or completeness of this information, and no person is entitled to rely thereon upon it.

## What is H1N1 Influenza?

Novel H1N1 (also referred to as “swine flu”) is a new influenza A virus strain causing illness in humans. Since it was first detected in April 2009, this virus is spreading from person-to-person, probably in much the same way that regular seasonal influenza viruses spread. It has now spread worldwide to every continent except Antarctica.

In normal seasonal flu, there are certain people that are at higher risk of serious flu-related complications. This includes people 65 years and older, children younger than five years old, pregnant women, and people of any age with certain chronic medical conditions. Indications are that pregnancy and other previously recognized medical conditions also appear to be associated with increased risk of complications from this H1N1 virus infection as well.

Reports indicate that no children and few adults younger than 60 years old have existing antibody to the H1N1 flu virus; however, about one-third of adults older than 60 may have antibodies against this virus.

So far, with this strain of H1N1 flu, the largest number of confirmed and probable cases has occurred in people between the ages of 5 and 24-years-old. At this time, there are few cases and no deaths reported in people older than 64 years old, which is unusual when compared with seasonal flu. However, pregnancy and other previously recognized high risk medical conditions that increase the risk of influenza-related complications, like asthma and diabetes, appear to be associated with increased risk of complications from this H1N1 strain.

In June 2009, the World Health Organization declared the incidence of H1N1 a pandemic — a reflection of the spread of the virus, not the severity of illness, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). At the time, more than 70 countries had reported cases of this strain of H1N1 flu. The United States has reported the largest number of cases of the virus, which has now spread to every state and four U.S. territories, according to the CDC.

## Symptoms of H1N1 Flu

The symptoms of this H1N1 flu virus in people are similar to the symptoms of seasonal flu.

They include:

- Fever, usually higher than 101° F, and chills
- Sore throat
- Headache
- Body and muscle aches
- Dry cough
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Tiredness, fatigue, and weakness

A significant number of people who have been infected with this H1N1 flu virus also have reported diarrhea and vomiting.

## Introduction

According to the CDC it is expected that most people will recover from the current strain of H1N1 flu without needing medical care. However, if an employee or guest becomes ill and begins to experience any of the following warning signs, have them seek emergency medical care.

In children, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish or gray skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Not waking up or not interacting
- Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough

In adults, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough

## How it is Transmitted

H1N1 flu is spread from infected people to other humans who come in contact with them. The virus is spread in the same way that seasonal flu is spread—through the air in tiny droplets when someone with the virus coughs, sneezes, laughs, or talks.

A person can also become infected when they touch a surface on which droplets have landed and then transfer the virus to your eyes, nose, or mouth. This includes doorknobs, elevator buttons, pens and pencils, computer keyboards, exercise equipment, television remote control, counter or table surfaces, and other commonly used items found in a hotel environment.

Touching used tissues, or sharing utensils, drinking glasses, or a toothbrush with an infected person can also expose a person to the H1N1 virus.

## Treatment of H1N1 Flu

If an infected person's symptoms are severe, healthcare providers may prescribe medications called antivirals. After taking the medication, the symptoms may be milder and one may recover quicker than without the medication. The medication also may prevent serious complications such as pneumonia. The drugs work best if given within 2 days of becoming ill, but may be given later if illness is severe or for those at a high risk for complications.

There are two influenza antiviral medications that are recommended for use against H1N1 flu. The prescription drugs that are used for treating this strain of H1N1 flu are called oseltamivir (trade name Tamiflu®) and zanamivir (Relenza®). As the H1N1 flu spreads, these antiviral drugs may become in short supply. Therefore, the drugs may be given first to those people who have been hospitalized or are at high risk of severe illness from flu.

Aspirin or aspirin-containing products (e.g., bismuth subsalicylate – Pepto Bismol) should NOT be administered to any confirmed or suspected ill case of H1N1 virus infection aged 18 years old and younger due to the risk of Reye's syndrome, a rare disease. For relief of fever, other anti-pyretic medications are recommended such as acetaminophen or non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs.

## Introduction

### Treating Flu Symptoms

In addition to any prescription drugs recommended by a healthcare provider, there are also other procedures that an infected person can do:

**Stay home from work.** Workers who have symptoms of influenza-like illness are recommended to stay home and not come to work until at least 24 hours after their fever has resolved. Staying home allows an infected person to recover faster and return to work, and also stops the spread of the virus in the workplace. Employers who keep sick employees home will recover their lodging business operations faster than those employers who do not.

**Drink lots of fluids.** Fluids such as water, fruit juice, and warm soup will prevent dehydration. A good rule is to drink enough so that you are able to urinate at your normal amount.

**Get plenty of rest.** Your body needs to rest to let your immune system function at the maximum level possible. A tired person will not recover as quickly.

**Ask your healthcare provider about fever and pain medications.** Take any medication only as directed. Acetaminophen can be administered. Do NOT give aspirin to children under age 18 because of a risk of contracting Reye's syndrome.

**Call your doctor if your fever becomes severe.** If your fever rises over 101 degrees F, or you become dizzy, light-headed, or experience shortness of breath, quickly seek medical attention.

### How To Protect Yourself and Others Against H1N1 Flu

- Stay informed. Health officials will provide additional information as it becomes available. Visit the U.S. government's central H1N1 Website at [www.flu.gov](http://www.flu.gov).
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective. Frequent handwashing is a proven way to prevent infection. CDC recommends that when you wash your hands -- with soap and warm water -- that you wash for 15 to 20 seconds.
- Carry an alcohol-based hand gel containing at least 60 percent alcohol. Use it when you don't have access to soap and water. Alcohol gels kill most germs and are safe for children.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth. Germs spread this way into your body.
- Cough or sneeze into a tissue. Then throw the tissue away and wash your hands. If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into the crook of your elbow.
- At home and work, clean phones, computer keyboards, and other surfaces you use often with disinfectant wipes.
- If possible, avoid close contact with others, especially if H1N1 cases have been identified in the area where you live.
- Don't share food, utensils, drinking glasses, or a toothbrush with others.
- Ask your doctor whether others in your household should receive antiviral medication to help them avoid infection.
- Follow public health advice regarding school closures, avoiding crowds, and other social distancing measures.
- If you are sick with a flu-like illness, stay home until at least 24 hours after you are free of fever or free from signs of a fever without the use of fever-reducing medications. (A fever is classed as a temperature of 100° F [37.8°C] or higher.) Please stay isolated in your home except to seek medical care or for other necessities. Think of others. Remember, you would want sick people to stay home to protect your own health.
- If you are sick, keep away from other household members as much as possible. This is to keep you from infecting others and spreading the virus further.
- A H1N1-specific vaccine will be made available by public health authorities in fall 2009. Vaccine will be available in a number of settings, such as vaccination clinics organized by local health departments, healthcare provider offices, schools, and other private settings such as pharmacies and workplaces. However, the seasonal flu vaccine being distributed this fall is NOT expected to protect against this strain of H1N1 flu.

## Introduction/Hotel Response Plan

- The government will offer the H1N1 vaccine in this order of priority:
  1. Pregnant women, caretakers of children under 6 months, health care workers and emergency medical workers, children and young adults 6 months through 24 years old, adults 24 to 64 who have underlying medical conditions such as asthma or diabetes that place them in higher risk categories
  2. Healthy adults 25 through 64 years old
  3. Healthy adults 65 and older

## Hotel Response Plan

This information is based on what is currently known about this new 2009 strain of H1N1 influenza A. It will be updated upon receiving new information. Updated copies of this booklet will be made available online to AH&LA members at [www.ahla.com/flu](http://www.ahla.com/flu).

Above all, you need to have a plan. This information can help you creating a plan, but it will not suffice for the plan itself. You need to take some time in your own hotel and sit down with your managers and staff and discuss many of the topics and how they would fit into your own hotel's operations.

What should you discuss and plan for if an H1N1 pandemic wave appears in your area? How will this affect your business, employees, guests, suppliers, and public health first responders?

Here are some suggested topic areas to get you started:

- Make the assumption that absenteeism will increase by approximately 25 percent above normal. It could be as high as 40 percent, according to government health authorities. Lower levels of absenteeism will occur for a few weeks on either side of the flu's peak.
- Develop a method for determining when to send employees home, as well as procedures for handling the tasks normally done by workers who have become ill.
- In some communities, schools may dismiss students and childcare programs may close, particularly if the severity increases. Plan now to determine how you will operate if absenteeism spikes from those who stay home to care for ill family members, and from those who must stay home to watch their children if dismissed from school.
- Assume a wave of H1N1 cases will appear in the United States during September and October 2009. There may be other waves throughout the next several months, lasting about eight weeks in duration.
- Designate a pandemic coordinator for the property. A committee should be established and include the department heads from housekeeping, maintenance and engineering, security, food services, administration, front desk and bell services, and other appropriate individuals.
- Identify essential employees and supplies critical to maintaining business operations.
- Any plan must include accurate lists of key agencies that should be contacted if a guest or employee is suspected of having H1N1 flu, as well as contacts that can provide your business accurate and timely local information. A complete list of state public health contacts can be found at [www.pandemicflu.gov](http://www.pandemicflu.gov).
- Train and educate employees to recognize symptoms among each other and guests, and provide definitive procedures for reporting suspected illness to management.
- Your vendors and their employees will also be suffering from the same flu as your employees. Their absentee rates may be the same as your employees. Because of this labor shortage, they may be unable to deliver food, clean linens, cleaning supplies, or undertake trash removal on a normal schedule.

## Training

Hotel employees who face potential exposure should be trained on the hazards associated with H1N1 flu, including symptoms, and the hotel procedures to isolate and report cases in order to reduce exposure.

### Sanitation and Hygiene

If a hotel is located in an area where H1N1 flu has been reported, the frequency of cleaning public surfaces in the hotel should be significantly increased. These include entrance/exit door handles, elevator buttons, public phones, computer keyboards, faucets, countertops, exercise equipment, and other commonly used surfaces. They should be decontaminated with soap and water or another approved sanitizer. Employees should be provided with surface sanitizers such as alcohol-based surface wipes that should be used to wipe workstation surfaces at the beginning of each shift.

Hands can transmit saliva or minute bodily fluids that may contain H1N1 viruses to the mouth, nose, or eyes. Hand washing is an important way to reduce the potential for the transmission of infectious diseases. Running water and non-abrasive hand soap should be used for at least 30 seconds when washing. It does not matter if the water is warm or cold, since it is the physical brushing of hands together combined with soap removes and kills the virus. It is important to dry hands after washing.

Hand washing should be done:

- Before and after removing gloves
- After contact with blood, body fluids, or other potentially infectious material or people
- After using the restroom
- After blowing or wiping your nose
- Before eating and preparing food

Employees should be reminded to not touch their own eyes, nose, and mouth until after they have washed their hands. Alcohol-based hand sanitizer may be used to sanitize hands, but should not be used as a substitute for hand washing.

To help encourage and promote good hygiene practices in the hospitality workplace, hand sanitizing products (bulk dispenser or individual packets) should be located within the break rooms and employee cafeteria settings. In addition, housekeeping service carts should be stocked with hand sanitizing products to place into rooms to encourage guests to use them. Employees should also practice good sneezing/coughing etiquette.

Health authorities have stated that people cannot catch influenza from hotel bedspreads or blankets. It is only transmitted through person-to-person contact.

### Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

The use of personal protective equipment (PPE) should be stressed during H1N1 exposure training. Approved PPE should be readily available at all times for anyone directly involved in hotel and room cleaning operations.

In case of a known guest infection, all designated employees entering the room should wear full PPE. This may include masks, disposable gloves, hair nets, aprons, etc.

Use of N95-level respirators or facemasks generally is not recommended for workers in non-healthcare occupational settings for general work activities. For specific work activities that involve contact with people who have H1N1, such as escorting a person with H1N1, interviewing a person with H1N1, providing assistance to an individual with H1N1, the following are recommended:

- Workers should try to maintain a distance of 6 feet or more from the person with H1N1.
- Workers should keep their interactions with ill persons as brief as possible
- The ill person should be asked to follow good cough etiquette and hand hygiene and to wear a facemask, if able, and if a facemask is available
- Workers at increased risk of severe illness from influenza infection should avoid people with ILI (possibly by temporary reassignment)
- Where workers cannot avoid close contact with persons with H1N1, some workers may choose to wear a facemask or N95 respirator on a voluntary basis.

## Hotel Response Plan/Employee Safety

The hotel should furnish PPE at no cost to its employees to encourage their use and disposal. As the PPE is issued, employees should be notified about what the PPE protects against and how it is to be cleaned and/or disposed of. The hotel should obtain this information from the manufacturer and follow their instructions.

Used, disposable PPEs such as covers, masks, and gloves should be treated as hazardous waste and placed inside red BIOHAZARD bags. Reusable PPEs (such as goggles) should be kept in a sealed bag after use and disinfected as per the manufacturer's instructions. Employees should first remove protective clothing (except for gloves) and discard them before removing a mask or goggles. Employees should inform their supervisor of any defective PPE, with the device immediately being replaced. This includes cracked, peeling, torn, punctured, or otherwise damaged PPE.

## Employee Safety

### The role of the Human Resources Department during a pandemic:

- Monitor employees for signs of illness. Those with symptoms of cough, nasal congestion, sneezing, and high fever should be directed to seek medical assistance. Set health standards for reporting and returning to work.
- Retain information on local clinics and medical facilities where employees and guests can see medical attention.
- Contact the local health department if a guest or employee has symptoms, and follow their recommendations, including protocol for dealing with a potentially infected individual.
- Postpone appointments for interviews and all training activities.
- Have a policy in place to handle sick employees who refuse to stay home when ill.
- Work with senior management to craft policies on absence and compensation for absence.
- Implement sick-leave policy. What other leave policies will be available and implemented (for example, an unpaid leave program for non-essential personnel and selectively for essential personnel, to accommodate those in isolation or whose absence is mandated by local health authorities)?
- Communicate work scheduling and possible temporary reduction in staff due to the impact of the pandemic on occupancy. Provide both Internet and telephone contacts on a 24/7 basis. Staff should understand that they should verify by phone or email before reporting for a work shift.
- Educate employees on ways to contain flu and stop virus spreading, including frequent hand washing, use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers, daily sanitization of public surface areas, use of disposable gloves, seasonal flu shot, etc.
- Post appropriate bulletins and posters with hygiene, safety, security, and other operational instructions and reminders for staff.
- Provide current updates to employees (and guests) from WHO ([www.who.int](http://www.who.int)) and the CDC ([www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)). The U.S. government's H1N1 flu site can also help ([www.flu.gov](http://www.flu.gov)).
- Maintain a current roster of all employees with home phone, cell, phone, email, or other contact data. This should be updated in instances where the employee may have moved the family to stay with relatives or friends in another geographic location. Retain in a preferred format and back up with an off-site reserve.
- Use all communication means to keep staff fully informed on status of the property, occupancy, any community data concerning the pandemic and its extent. Serve as source for any quarantine instructions or prohibitions mandated by local authorities.

Your human resources department should coordinate all training activities:

- Provide information on infection control, hygiene, and medical advisories pertaining to the pandemic.
- Train staff on identifying symptoms and the procedure for reporting suspected cases.
- Involve the appropriate department when providing instructions on food service, room service, housekeeping, and maintenance functions involving a room where the guest may be infected.
- Provide cross-training where it may become necessary, due to absences for remaining staff, to serve in multi-function assignments.

## Employee Safety

- If possible, involve medical and training support through medical or health department personnel from the community. This seems unlikely in the event of a pandemic, but might be considered as a proactive training function for “key personnel.” Work closely with the staff of the clinic or medical facility providing medical services to your establishment. They should be the source for development of strategies and procedures in sanitizing, handling infected guests and staff.

### What to do if an Employee is Sick

If an employee appears to exhibit symptoms of H1N1 flu, hotel management should be notified immediately.

Management is strongly encouraged to establish a very liberal sick leave policy for employees to use during a H1N1 outbreak, and notify employees that use of this liberal sick leave policy is encouraged by management.

The White House and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control have urged American businesses to tell sick employees to stay home if they are afflicted with H1N1 flu. Staying home allows an infected person to recover faster and return to work, and also stops the spread of the virus in the workplace. Employers who keep sick employees home will recover their lodging business operations faster than those employers who do not.

Human Resources should be contacted to evaluate sick-leave absence procedures for H1N1 flu.

#### **Upon notification of a sick employee:**

As with all other personal illnesses, relieve the employee of their duties and recommend that they contact or visit their personal physician or the local health department. Employees should make their physician or the health department aware of their symptoms and situation before they visit their doctor’s office/health facility.

### What Employees Should do if Sick, or Begin to Experience Symptoms While at Work

If you begin to exhibit symptoms of H1N1 flu:

- Ensure you are familiar with all H1N1 flu symptoms.
- Take precautionary measures, such as getting extra rest and drink more fluids so that you are stronger and healthier.
- Do NOT go to work! Avoid travel, if possible.
- Avoid crowded places.
- If you develop a fever above 101° F accompanied with cough and muscle pain, immediately inform your manager or supervisor before going to a doctor or health facility.
- Be aware and follow the recommended actions from your local physician or health provider.
- If you are quarantined by health authorities, inform your manager or supervisor.
- Compile a list of individuals you have been in contact with for the past 3 days and communicate this information via telephone or email to your manager or supervisor. You should make every effort to comply with all home quarantine requirements.

## If a Guest is Sick

If a guest begins to exhibit symptoms of H1N1 flu, hotel management should be notified immediately. Upon notification, they should activate their H1N1 plan and implement within their own hotel's situation the appropriate measures below:

### Reporting:

- Follow the hotel's procedures to notify ownership and management company.
- Contact the local health department. Make sure the supervisor speaks to someone in charge of H1N1 flu responses.
- Follow any recommendations from the local health department, including any actions to be taken for dealing with a potentially infected individual. Follow their advice as best you can.

### Safety Precautions:

- Try to keep the ill guest separated from other guests as much as possible.
- Avoid rooms where sneezing and coughing is heard and allow an hour after the guest leaves before entering the room.
- Recommend that the ill guest contact their personal physician or the local health department. Have the local contact numbers readily available, as they may not know who to contact in an unfamiliar city.
- Do not attempt to transport the guest to a healthcare provider or any other location.
- Develop an isolation plan with assistance from your local health department. Be prepared to isolate a room or an area as instructed by the local health department.
- If an infected guest checks out, electronically key or double-lock the room and thoroughly clean the room by following the procedures under "Guest room decontamination".
- If the ill guest is transported off the property, but the room remains occupied by family or friends, recommend that the remaining guests contact their personal physician immediately, or your local health department. Room service or any other activity for that room should be discontinued and no employees should be allowed to enter the room until further notice. Inform the remaining guests that it is being done for the hotel employees' own safety.
- Record all the details that were undertaken by hotel staff and management for further action and follow-up.
- Evaluate and plan for any potential business interruptions.
- In some jurisdictions, innkeeper laws define "illness" as a reason for guest eviction. As a result, a hotel may evict a "contagiously ill" guest as long as the guest may be moved without aggravating the guest's personal condition, or the public health situation. Research to discover what your state's law defines as reasons for guest eviction based on illness.

## Guest Room Decontamination

In the event that one of your guests or employees shows sign of H1N1 infection, you will also need a plan for cleaning and handling guest and public rooms, restaurants, and other areas in the hotel.

Hotel management should help ensure that all employees involved in the cleaning of a potentially infected room or area follow superior sanitation precautions and any best practices established for their housekeeping task. A review of the exposures and procedures to be taken should precede any actions, with additional training for any part-time or transferred employees.

The following are suggested basic procedures that should be reviewed as part of the response plan for hotel employees. A hotel should evaluate their own specific operation and circumstances to add to their own unique plan, where needed.

If a guest is admitted to the hospital and the guest's items remain in the room, the hotel can follow these procedures for handling abandoned property. The room should be cleaned after these procedures are followed, and the items handled appropriately for possible BIOHAZARD contamination. Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) such as disposable gloves or facemasks should be worn by the employee while performing this task.

### **Linen handling**

Linens and bedding should not be sorted in the guest rooms. Before handling, employees should check the bedding and linens for sharp objects, blood, or bodily fluids before handling. The linen should be handled with protective gloves and placed into red plastic BIOHAZARD bags. If the linen is to be washed at the hotel, only trained employees should handle the contaminated laundry. Linen should be transferred directly from the plastic bag into the washing machine without contact. The BIOHAZARD bag should not be reused, but discarded as hazardous waste. Linens and bedding should be washed with an approved disinfectant. Any material that cannot be cleaned should be disposed of as hazardous waste.

### **Sharp objects**

Employees should not touch or handle contaminated items, such as sharp objects left by the guest. Small medical items like hypodermic needles and syringes should be picked up with tongs and placed into a puncture-resistant plastic or metal container. These objects should never be placed in the trash, or in any container that isn't puncture-resistant. Waste should be collected and double-bagged for transport to a sealable container that can be locked with not in use.

### **Cleaning and disinfection of surfaces**

A bleach and water solution can be used to decontaminate most of the surfaces and equipment found in the hotel. This is a safe method for decontamination because it doesn't expose the employees to harsh chemicals and the components are readily available and inexpensive. EPA-approved disinfectant products should be used as an alternative for sensitive surfaces such as carpeting where the use of bleach could damage the material.

Additional attention should be given to surfaces that have been directly touched by the guest, such as light switches, door knobs, toilets, television remote control, hand basins, telephones, desk surfaces, alarm clock, table surfaces, dresser or counter tops, etc.

If equipment used to clean the room becomes contaminated, labels should be attached to inform other employees or service people of the potential hazard. The label should state BIOHAZARD and be written in high-visibility orange or red. The equipment should be disinfected according to the manufacturer's instructions. The appropriate PPE should be worn and used by staff while cleaning and decontaminating equipment.

### Food and Flu

Purchasing professionals and all food service functions in the property should be represented in the development of strategies for providing food service during a pandemic.

Despite its name, H1N1/swine influenza viruses are not spread by food. A person cannot get H1N1/swine influenza from eating pork or pork products. Eating properly handled and cooked pork products is safe.

Any influenza virus found on food surfaces is killed by cooking temperatures of 160° F / 70° C, corresponding to the general guidance for the preparation of pork and other meats.

Coordinate with the health authorities in the community to identify any restrictions or requirements that might be mandated during a flu pandemic emergency. There may be a need for some menu adjustments as certain products may be prohibited.

It will also be necessary to discuss quantity of perishable products as dairy and produce, which may be difficult to obtain, should the pandemic limit suppliers' delivery capacity. Consider alternative products (for example, powdered eggs and milk).

Consider developing a working and ongoing purchasing relationship with several suppliers. Having a single source could be disastrous in the event that source is incapacitated.

### Communications with Guests and Employees

As information is almost as useful as disinfectant in a H1N1 flu environment, communication with guests, employees, the general public, public health officials, and management is vital and must not be overlooked in any plan.

- Assign one person in the hotel as the primary contact to handle all guest and/or corporate calls. Everyone in the hotel staff should know to forward all inquiries to this person.
- Do not release details of any affected guest.
- Be prepared to update your press release statement. A sample press release statement is found at the end of this booklet.
- Ensure that all employees are aware of the health concerns behind H1N1. Give the staff regular updates about the hotel and local situation. If there is an affected guest, keep the hotel employees informed about the situation and answer any rumors with facts.
- Obtain any current fact sheets or bulletins from your local health department. Consider requesting that the local health department visit the hotel and conduct a briefing for employees, followed by an open question-and-answer session.
- Be prepared to support any afflicted guest with family calls and information. Remember, good customer service in this kind of crisis situation is extremely important.
- A toll-free or dedicated emergency hotline (in appropriate languages) should be set up to keep employees informed about business operations during a local H1N1 flu outbreak. Employees should be encouraged to use the hotline or contact their manager or supervisor for updates and information.
- Stay connected to information resources. Learn about your state's pandemic plans. Become familiar with the many information resources available on the Internet and the government's central H1N1 flu Website, [www.flu.gov](http://www.flu.gov).
- Check travel advisories frequently at [www.cdc.gov/travel](http://www.cdc.gov/travel), watch news reports on television, check the many official news and information resources on the Internet, and listen to local and national radio. Stay informed—you will be the one employees turn to for accurate news and information about what to do.

## Severe Pandemic Flu Planning

At present, H1N1 has shown itself to be a milder virus that originally feared when it first appeared in April 2009.

This variant of H1N1 has remained a relatively mild virus demonstrating the same symptoms since it was first discovered in April 2009. However, this virus has the potential to quickly turn into something much worse.

If this H1N1 strain mutates into something that has the potential to kill hundreds of thousands of Americans and severely sicken millions of others, than the following information and thoughts will prove invaluable in the safety of your employees—and yourself—and the operation of your hotel during this kind of severe crisis.

The plan you create BEFORE a severe crisis strikes will be the plan that you will use to guide yourself through its initial stages. Your own plan will change as this kind of grave situation unfolds. Again, the information below cannot serve as your plan, but it can help you with a number of very important topics to discuss and consider.

Topics to ponder include:

**Your local public health officials.** Determine the chief medical officer for the community, probably the director of the department of health. Be conversant with all aspects of their community-wide plan. Communicate with local and/or state public health agencies and/or emergency respondents about the assets and/or services your business could contribute to the community. Collaborate with federal, state, and local public health agencies and/or emergency responders to participate in their planning processes, share your pandemic plans, and understand their capabilities and plans. Collaborate with insurers, health plans, and major local healthcare facilities to share your pandemic plans and to understand their capabilities and plans. Also, be aware that according to official government plans to handle a major influenza pandemic, the situation may dictate that local, community-wide measures be enforced, such as suspension of public gatherings. This may affect events scheduled at your property such as meetings and conventions.

**Communications.** Establish an emergency communications plan and revise periodically. Have a roster of community organizations and several contact persons in each organization. Have a similar listing for key personnel at corporate headquarters or owner contact data for independent or management contracted properties. There must be an internal employee contact system and a communication link with the appropriate health and emergency response agencies for the community. The internal system should include cell phone, email, home phone number, and out-of-area contact data for all staff. Update on a continuing basis and maintain an off-site back-up. Designate a spokesperson to address all inquiries from the media and friends or families of sick guests. For every essential staff position, establish several layers of designated back-up contacts to step in, should the designated person become incapacitated.

**Business operational levels.** Management will have to determine at what level the hotel's standard guest operations should function during this kind of crisis. For example:

- *Phase One:* Limited operations with guest services. No event functions.
- *Phase Two:* Guest services with limited menu
- *Phase Three:* Close operations due to quarantine or impact of pandemic on staff and guests.

Determining applicable phases should be a management decision based upon careful analysis of potential options under pandemic conditions.

**Vaccination.** Determine availability and allocation of vaccine within your community. Who should be vaccinated? Should a roster of critical management, supervision and staff be established with the vaccine extended to their family members so they could reside at the property during a pandemic? If the vaccine proves to be effective, this would provide a stable work force for operation at a minimal service level. It would eliminate the need for commuting with less exposure and would relieve the initial concern for the condition of one's immediate family. Involve corporate counsel in the decision to dispense vaccines at your hotel to ensure liability issues are adequately addressed.

**Training.** Coordinate with senior management and human resources to create a policy on training in all aspects of pandemic flu preparedness and response. Develop the program in cooperation with the corporate medical services and appropriate support organizations within the community.

## Severe Pandemic Flu Planning

**Information.** Maintain up-to-date reliable information from public health organizations, including local authorities, CDC, and WHO. Involve legal counsel and the local authorities having jurisdiction for health matters, certifications and licensing within the jurisdiction.

**Monitoring.** Be prepared to conduct symptom and temperature checks for employees and guests.

**Ad-hoc clinic.** Under conditions of a pandemic, it is possible the hotel will become for all practical intentions and purposes a clinic. If guests are stricken and the local hospitals, clinics, and healthcare facilities are at and in many instances over-capacity, the guest cannot be put out on the street. The hotel has now become a healthcare facility without certification or license and without professional staff. Be sure this matter is resolved within your community.

**Overwhelmed official response.** Be aware that your local community response capability may not exist. **YOU MAY BE ON YOUR OWN.** Phone and Internet services may still be available but there may not be an on-premises response capability from public health and emergency agencies in the community. This could very well include your local fire and police agencies, who may be overwhelmed with requests, or their personnel suffering from the same malady.

**Events.** Be prepared to inform your customers immediately of any events that need to be cancelled. Provide secured access from off-site to reservation and contract events schedule. If feasible, have alternative reservations at another facility in the community under the same hotel flag. Notify the client of the change of location and confirmation to the alternative location. Where such an arrangement is not possible, have a pre-determined list of alternative sites available to the client in the community. It may happen there is no property available in which instance the employee from the secured offsite location will advise the client of the inability of the community to accommodate the reservation under any circumstance. Where it is possible to provide for accommodations at a competing facility, the off-site center would advise both the property and the client with appropriate reservation confirmation. All such transactions would be stored and secured both at the main frame and at a back-up site. That should be a site other than the location from which the employee is operating.

**Contracts.** Consideration should be given to adding a cancellation clause in the event of a flu pandemic for future contracts. Such an addition to the contract “boiler plate” should be reviewed with corporate counsel and senior management. It would be a logistic impossibility to effectively move a major event to a facility under your chain’s flag, or to a competing facility in the community from an off-site employee location. It would be more logical to operate under the cancellation clause and the off-site employee would provide such notice in the instance of a pandemic flu scenario in your area. There would be little likelihood of the desire for an organization and/or its members to travel for such an event, if travel still is allowed by authorities.

**Business operations.** There are also a number of everyday business operations that management will have to address.

- Handle all function cancellations without penalty. Suspend guest penalties for failure to cancel within time limits.
- Identify those who will serve as basic staff for maintaining minimal operations.
- Will they and their family take up residence in the property during the pandemic?
- Are there staff who may be able to work from home? Identify tasks and contacts for implementation in an emergency.
- Determine the basic records and operating systems to be maintained. Who will be in charge? Are there to be off-site assignments? Where will back-up be established and maintained?
- What will the critical communication needs be? How are they to be implemented?
- Develop a compensation schedule. All staff should understand the alternatives when they are unable to work which may include sick leave, compensated time off, involuntary time off, and eligibility for workers compensation when operations are limited for a significant period of time.
- What staff should be moved to unpaid leave status? Who will notify and how? Phone, Internet, mail, etc.
- There will undoubtedly be a major insurance challenge under business interruption insurance policies as insurance companies will confront potential bankruptcy in meeting policy obligations over an extended period of

## Severe Pandemic Flu Planning

time. Under many such policies monies for key staff are included. Consider alternatives should the insurance fail to pay. What contingency plans and structures are feasible under such an income relief failure?

- Release interns, trainees, casual/contract, and temporary workers.
- Close under-utilized facilities (e.g., gift shop, business center, etc.)
- Consider reducing work week and shorten operational hours.

### **If the worst occurs and H1N1 turns into an extremely severe pandemic flu crisis**

According to official government plans to handle a major and severe pandemic flu crisis, the situation may dictate that local, community-wide measures are enforced, such as suspension of public gatherings, which will affect events at your property. There also may be official travel restrictions that would result in substantial cancellations.

Some authorities also have suggested that in a severe pandemic crisis hotels may be used as quarantine sites. If that happens, outline steps you can take now to feed and house your employees and guests who are required by official order to stay at your hotel.

**Isolation ward.** Should an “isolation ward” be established to house employees and guests who are waiting for transportation to a medical facility and/or treatment? If so, be sure the ventilation and all air movement systems are not moving contaminated air into other parts of the establishment. Remember air moves through bathroom stacks as well as through plenums, risers, and other duct systems throughout a multi-story property. Equip with a bed or couch, first aid kit, face masks, and gloves and locate away from main activity areas.

**Isolation ward staffing.** If the isolation ward concept is instituted, who will serve those units? If there are a number of vaccinated staff from several departments, you might establish a premium pay arrangement and have those staff serve as an unofficial nursing staff. They will assume responsibility for laundry, food service, housekeeping, human waste removal, bedding and bed clothes changes, and coordination of medical services if such can be obtained under the emergency conditions.

**Fatalities.** In the event of a death, what is your responsibility for having the body removed to the morgue? If the morgue is unable to function, what do you do with the body? What role should be assumed in reporting to the family of an infected guest who is unable to communicate? What is to be done on notification of next of kin in the event of a death? This role is normally handled through the police. What is your responsibility if the police operations have been crippled within the community? How do you secure the personal effects, possibly including a motor vehicle? These are issues to be reviewed with corporate counsel and the local authority having jurisdiction.

**Closure of property.** Develop protocol for shutting down should it become no longer possible to operate or you must evacuate. How will systems be shut down permitting departure of the last person? Is there a published listing of turn-off points for energy and water sources? Depending upon outside temperatures, what minimal HVAC must be maintained? How will the property be secured? Have a plan for back-up of critical financial and other management records. Is there a plan for securing the property against looters?

## Additional Resources

Unlike the last time there was a declared flu pandemic in 1968, hoteliers today are presented with a wealth of informational resources about H1N1 and pandemic flu via the Internet. The more your employees and you know about H1N1 and actions to prevent its spread, the better your property will be prepared.

### First Resources

[www.ahla.com/flu](http://www.ahla.com/flu) - AH&LA's H1N1 flu information Webpage. This page contains news updates, links to government information resources, industry-specific information, equipment resources, and more.

[www.flu.gov](http://www.flu.gov) - The U.S. government's one-stop Website for official information, links to further resources, travel information, and general information about the 2009 flu pandemic

[www.cdc.gov/H1N1flu/](http://www.cdc.gov/H1N1flu/) - The Centers for Disease Control's (CDC) H1N1 Website, listing current outbreaks, numbers of those infected, and prevention information.

### Workplace Planning

[www.pandemicflu.gov/professional/business/](http://www.pandemicflu.gov/professional/business/) - Businesses will play a key role in protecting employees' health and safety as well as limiting the negative impact to the economy and society. This U.S. government Webpage can help travel businesses plan for pandemic influenza.

[www.osha.gov/Publications/influenza\\_pandemic.html](http://www.osha.gov/Publications/influenza_pandemic.html) - This online OSHA booklet, "Preparing Workplaces for an Influenza Pandemic," describes how to maintain business operations during a flu pandemic outbreak.

[www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic/pdf/businessChecklist.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic/pdf/businessChecklist.pdf) - The "Business Pandemic Planning Checklist" produced by the CDC can help businesses when planning their operations during a flu pandemic

[www.pandemicflu.gov/faq/workplace\\_questions/](http://www.pandemicflu.gov/faq/workplace_questions/) - This government Webpage answers common questions about workplace policies and law when confronting pandemic flu in the workplace, such as leave policies, workplace rules, return to work, and other employment topics

## Sample Guest Letter

This is a sample letter that hotels can use to communicate with guests in the event of a H1N1 outbreak in their local areas. This letter should be modified based on the events occurring in a specific area during the time of the outbreak.

Dear Valued Guest,

Welcome to [Hotel Name]. It is a pleasure to have you stay with us.

Guest safety is our top priority at [Hotel Name]. Because of the recent media reports concerning the local outbreak of H1N1 influenza, our hotel has immediately implemented a number of increased health and safety measures.

We strive to maintain high standards of food and environmental hygiene at our hotel. In addition to the high cleanliness standards already in place to combat the spread of H1N1 flu, we have taken additional precautionary measures:

[Include all those that apply]

- Increased hand washing and sanitation efforts by staff members
- Providing more soap and hand-cleanser products for use by guests and employees
- Frequent sanitizing of publicly used surfaces in the hotel, such as countertops and doorknobs
- Rooms are thoroughly sanitized by staff after each guest has checked out
- Hotel employees who are exhibiting flu symptoms are sent home for rest and recovery
- Food products made of pork are thoroughly cooked
- Increased contact with local health authorities and are following their instructions about public health areas and how to contain infections

We are committed to complying with the stringent health standards recommended by local health authorities during this flu pandemic.

Should you have any questions or require more information during your stay with us, please do not hesitate to contact me at any time.

Thank you for choosing to stay with us.

Warmest regards,

[Name]  
General Manager, Hotel

## Sample Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact Name

Phone Number or Email Address

### INFLUENZA IN [Hotel Name]

[Date] - The [Hotel Name] in [City, State] has taken a number of stringent precautionary measures to address H1N1 influenza concerns. As always, our top priority at [Hotel Name] is to help ensure the health, safety, and well-being of our hotel guests and employees. We strive to maintain the highest standards of sanitation and food hygiene at our property.

In addition to these standards, we have taken additional precautions to reduce the concerns that any of our guests may have regarding the presence of H1N1 flu virus in [Hotel Name].

The precautions that have been taken at [Hotel Name] include:

- Increased hand washing and sanitation efforts by staff members
- Providing more soap and hand-cleanser products for use by guests and employees
- Frequent sanitizing of publicly used surfaces in the hotel, such as countertops and doorknobs
- Rooms are thoroughly sanitized by staff after each guest has checked out
- Hotel employees who are exhibiting flu symptoms are sent home for rest and recovery
- Food products made of pork are thoroughly cooked
- Increased contact with local health authorities and are following their instructions about public health areas and how to contain infections

[Additional information about local H1N1 or hotel conditions.]

In the meantime, the staff at [Hotel Name] are monitoring the situation closely for any further developments. If there are any additional queries, please contact [Name] at [phone number or email address].

## Sample Employee Communication

### H1N1 Influenza

As you may have heard from news reports, H1N1 flu has been reported in our area. Based on the information we have gathered from local health authorities, there is no cause for undue concern at this time. The public health and medical authorities have been working with hospitals to protect the public from illness.

The local public health authorities are also relying upon you to help protect the traveling public. The most important tool you have to protect our guests is information. I urge each of you to become familiar with the facts about H1N1 flu and what are its symptoms. Not all flu-like ailments are H1N1 flu, since the symptoms resemble the same as ordinary seasonal flu.

Those suffering from H1N1 flu usually have the same symptoms as ordinary seasonal flu, such as fever, cough, muscle ache, runny nose, fatigue, and sore throat. At an early stage, it is difficult to tell which infection is responsible for an afflicted person's symptoms.

They include:

- Fever, usually higher than 101° F, and chills
- Sore throat
- Headache
- Body and muscle aches
- Dry cough
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Tiredness, fatigue, and weakness

A significant number of people who have been infected with this H1N1 flu virus also have reported diarrhea and vomiting.

Despite H1N1 flu's other name—swine flu—there is no evidence that it can be spread through the eating of processed poultry/pork products.

### How to minimize your chances for contracting the disease

While there is no guarantee that doing the following will prevent you from getting H1N1 flu, these simple precautions will significantly reduce your chances of catching it.

- Above all: Use good hygiene to minimize the spread of the flu! Simple hand washing will go a long way to removing the virus from your own personal environment.
- Avoid direct and/or close contact with ill persons.
- Proper disposal of used tissues or other articles that have come in contact with your nose, throat, mouth, or eyes. These are the areas that allow the flu into your body.
- Room attendants should continue to use gloves to change used guest towels and empty trash cans
- Room attendants should continue to sanitize door knobs, TV remote controls, sink basin knobs, light switches, and countertops with the proper disinfectant
- Used towels and bed linen should be removed and washed each day
- Avoid rooms where you hear sneezing or coughing and allow an hour after the guest leaves before entering the room

If an issue or concern should arise at our hotel, employees should follow these steps to help protect the well-being of the affected guest, employees, patrons of the hotel—and themselves.

- Notify your supervisor or the general manager of any concerns.
- The general manager, or his/her designee, will be the point person and the only spokesperson to respond to media enquiries about H1N1 flu and the hotel's precautions against its spread.

## Sample Employee Communication

- Follow the procedures given to you from your supervisor or management.
- Do not release the details of any potentially affected guest or employee.
- Be prepared to support the guest or employee with family calls and information. If the situations were reversed, you would want to be helped when you are ill.
- Follow all company procedures for reporting possible incidents about infected guests or employees.

Thank you for your kind cooperation with these procedures and requests.

[Name of General Manager]

## Sample Employee Communication if Other Employees/Guests Have Contracted H1N1 Flu

### H1N1 Influenza

As you may have heard from news reports, H1N1 flu has been reported in our area. Based on the information we have gathered from local health authorities, there is no cause for undue concern at this time. The public health and medical authorities have been working with hospitals to protect the public from illness.

In our own facility, there has been a reported case of H1N1 flu. We are reporting this to our employees so that they may monitor themselves for flu symptoms and take appropriate precautions.

The most important tool you have to protect yourself, your family, the other hotel employees, and our guests is information. I urge each of you to become familiar with the facts about H1N1 flu and what are its symptoms. Not all flu-like ailments are H1N1 flu, since the symptoms resemble the same as ordinary seasonal flu.

Those suffering from H1N1 flu usually have the same symptoms as ordinary seasonal flu, such as fever, cough, muscle ache, runny nose, fatigue, and sore throat. At an early stage, it is difficult to tell which infection is responsible for an afflicted person's symptoms.

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While there is no guarantee that doing the following will prevent you from getting H1N1 flu, these simple precautions will significantly reduce your chances of catching it.

- Above all: Use good hygiene to minimize the spread of the flu! Simple hand washing will go a long way to removing the virus from your own personal environment.
- Avoid direct and/or close contact with ill persons.

### Sample Employee Communication if Other Employees/Guests Have Contracted H1N1 Flu

- Proper disposal of used tissues or other articles that have come in contact with your nose, throat, mouth, or eyes. These are the areas that allow the flu into your body.
- Room attendants should continue to use gloves to change used guest towels and empty trash cans
- Room attendants should continue to sanitize door knobs, TV remote controls, sink basin knobs, light switches, and countertops with the proper disinfectant
- Used towels and bed linen should be removed and washed each day
- Avoid rooms where you hear sneezing or coughing and allow an hour after the guest leaves before entering the room
- Follow the procedures given to you from your supervisor or management.
- Do not release the details of any potentially affected guest or employee.
- Be prepared to support the guest or employee with family calls and information. If the situations were reversed, you would want to be helped when you are ill.
- Follow all company procedures for reporting possible incidents about infected guests or employees.

Thank you for your kind cooperation with these procedures and requests.

[Name of General Manager]

## Common Hotel Areas for Decontamination

These steps should be in any hotelier's plan of attack on influenza viruses.

- Follow the instructions provided by your local health department
- Stock enough cleaning products for the size of your operation
- Provide your employees with the proper Personal Protection Equipment, such as disposable gloves
- Provide hand sanitizer products and tissues in the employee and public areas
- Monitor your employee's health, and emphasize cough etiquette

These areas in a hotel should receive heightened sanitizing attention during this period. There will be other commonly touched surfaces in your hotel requiring attention, so make sure you add them to this list.

### **Guest Rooms**

Door handles  
Door security latches  
Desks and chair handles  
Dresser and table drawer handles  
Table countertop surfaces  
Telephone keys  
TV remote control buttons  
Toilet and faucet handles  
Lights and temperature control switches  
In-room information resources, such as menus  
Room keys

### **Lobby, Public Areas and Restaurants**

Door handles and stair railings  
Push plates on swing doors  
Elevator buttons  
Tables and chairs  
Menus  
Public telephones  
Counter surfaces at reception and concierge areas  
Pens used for signing receipts  
Computer keyboards and mouse  
Ice machines  
Beverage service items, such as coffee and tea pot handles  
Exercise equipment in fitness rooms

### **Public Restrooms**

Door handles and stair railings  
Handles on stall doors  
Toilet and faucet handles  
Soap dispenser handles  
Counter surfaces  
Towel dispensing handles

### **Back of House Property**

Door handles and stair railings  
Push plates on swing doors  
Telephone and computer keypads  
Computer mouse  
Food serving scoops and spoons  
Beverage service handles  
Refrigerator handles  
Toilet and faucet handles  
Soap dispenser handles  
Towel dispensing handles  
Cleaning equipment and tool handles  
Bucket and trashcan handles

## **H1N1 Flu Concerns: Employee Questions-and-Answers**

**Based on information provided by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC)**

### **Is this H1N1 (swine) flu virus contagious?**

CDC has determined that this influenza A/H1N1 virus is contagious and is spreading from human to human. However, at this time, it is not known how easily the virus spreads between people.

### **What are the signs and symptoms of H1N1 flu in people?**

The symptoms of H1N1 flu in people are similar to the symptoms of regular human flu and include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people have reported diarrhea and vomiting associated with H1N1 flu. In the past, severe illness (pneumonia and respiratory failure) and deaths have been reported with H1N1 flu infection in people. Like seasonal flu, H1N1 flu may cause a worsening of underlying chronic medical conditions.

### **How does H1N1 flu spread?**

Spread of this influenza A (H1N1) virus is thought to be happening in the same way that seasonal flu spreads. Flu viruses are spread mainly from person to person through coughing or sneezing of people with influenza. Sometimes people may become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose.

### **How can someone with the flu infect someone else?**

Infected people may be able to infect others beginning 1 day before symptoms develop and up to 7 or more days after becoming sick. That means that you may be able to pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick.

### **What should I do to keep from getting the flu?**

First and most important: wash your hands. Try to stay in good general health. Get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids, and eat nutritious food. Try not touch surfaces that may be contaminated with the flu virus. Avoid close contact with people who are sick.

### **Are there medicines to treat H1N1 flu?**

Yes. CDC recommends the use of oseltamivir or zanamivir for the treatment and/or prevention of infection with these H1N1 influenza viruses. Antiviral drugs are prescription medicines (pills, liquid or an inhaler) that fight against the flu by keeping flu viruses from reproducing in your body. If you get sick, antiviral drugs can make your illness milder and make you feel better faster. They may also prevent serious flu complications. For treatment, antiviral drugs work best if started soon after getting sick (within 2 days of symptoms). A H1N1 vaccine is projected to be ready by fall 2009, but it is a new vaccine that is still being tested.

### **How long can an infected person spread H1N1 flu to others?**

People with H1N1 influenza virus infection should be considered potentially contagious as long as they are symptomatic and possible for up to 7 days following illness onset. Children, especially younger children, might potentially be contagious for longer periods.

### **What surfaces are most likely to be sources of contamination?**

Germs can be spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose, or mouth. Droplets from a cough or sneeze of an infected person move through the air. Germs can be spread when a person touches respiratory droplets from another person on a surface like a desk and then touches their own eyes, mouth or nose before washing their hands.

### **How long can viruses live outside the body?**

Some viruses and bacteria can live 2 hours or longer on surfaces like cafeteria tables, doorknobs, and desks. Frequent hand washing will help you reduce the chance of getting contamination from these common surfaces.

### **What can I do to protect myself from getting sick?**

In fall 2009, a H1N1 vaccine will be made available by public health authorities to Americans, initially according to

health risks and other public health criteria, such as doctors or firefighters. However, there are everyday actions that can help prevent the spread of germs that cause respiratory illnesses like H1N1 influenza.

Take these everyday steps to protect your own health:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- If you get sick with influenza, CDC recommends that you stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.

### **What is the best way to keep from spreading the virus through coughing or sneezing?**

If you are sick, limit your contact with other people as much as possible. Do not go to work or school if ill. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. It may prevent those around you from getting sick. Put your used tissue in the waste basket. Cover your cough or sneeze if you do not have a tissue. Then, clean your hands, and do so every time you cough or sneeze.

### **What is the best technique for washing my hands to avoid getting H1N1 flu?**

Washing your hands often will help protect you from germs. Wash with soap and water. or clean with alcohol-based hand cleaner. It is recommended that when you wash your hands -- with soap and warm water -- that you wash for 15 to 20 seconds. When soap and water are not available, alcohol-based disposable hand wipes or gel sanitizers may be used. If using gel, rub your hands until the gel is dry. The gel doesn't need water to work; the alcohol in it kills the germs on your hands.

### **What should I do if I get sick?**

If you live in areas where H1N1 influenza cases have been identified and become ill with influenza-like symptoms, including fever, body aches, runny nose, sore throat, nausea, or vomiting or diarrhea, you may want to contact their health care provider, particularly if you are worried about your symptoms. Your health care provider will determine whether influenza testing or treatment is needed.

If you are sick, you should stay home and avoid contact with other people as much as possible to keep from spreading your illness to others.

If you become ill and experience any of the following warning signs, seek emergency medical care.

In children, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Not waking up or not interacting
- Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough
- Fever with a rash

In adults, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting

### **How serious is H1N1 flu infection?**

Like seasonal flu, swine flu in humans can vary in severity from mild to severe. Between 2005 until January 2009, 12 human cases of H1N1 flu were detected in the U.S. with no deaths occurring. However, H1N1 flu infection can be serious. In September 1988, a previously healthy 32-year-old pregnant woman in Wisconsin was hospitalized for pneumonia after being infected with H1N1 flu and died 8 days later. A H1N1 flu outbreak in Fort Dix, New Jersey, occurred in 1976 that caused more than 200 cases with serious illness in several people and one death. And with the current 2009 H1N1 pandemic, over 500 people have died nationwide from H1N1 and its complications.

### **Can I get H1N1 influenza from eating or preparing pork?**

No. H1N1, also known as swine influenza, viruses are not spread by food. You cannot get H1N1/swine influenza from eating pork or pork products. Eating properly handled and cooked pork products is safe.

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