

Client Update: May, 2009

## Safety Bulletin: Pandemic Flu

*The recent outbreak of the Swine Flu (H1N1) has caused global concerns of a potential pandemic. This safety bulletin addresses the potential risk management implications of H1N1, with suggestions on how to prepare for and respond to an outbreak.*

*Swine Flu and its spread continue to be closely monitored by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Center for Disease Control (CDC). Although the situation is under surveillance, it is sound risk management practice to be prepared by developing guidelines to prevent exposure to employees in the workplace, which will help to ensure business continuity in the event of an outbreak.*

### THE SWINE FLU (H1N1) DEFINED

The following FAQs have been provided by the CDC and answer many questions surrounding the Swine Flu outbreak.

#### What is Swine Influenza?

Swine Influenza (swine flu) is a respiratory disease of pigs caused by type-A influenza virus. Swine flu viruses cause high levels of illness and low death rates in pigs. Swine influenza viruses may circulate among swine throughout the year, but most outbreaks occur during the late fall and winter months similar to outbreaks in humans.

#### How many swine flu viruses are there?

Like all influenza viruses, swine flu viruses change constantly. Pigs can be infected by avian influenza and human influenza viruses as well as swine influenza viruses. When influenza viruses from different species infect pigs, the viruses can resort (i.e. swap genes) and new viruses that are a mix of swine, human and/or avian influenza viruses can emerge. Over the years, different variations of swine flu viruses have emerged. At this time, there are four main influenza type-A virus subtypes that have been isolated in pigs: H1N1, H1N2, H3N2, and H3N1.

However, most of the recently isolated influenza viruses from pigs have been H1N1 viruses.

#### What are the symptoms of swine flu in humans?

The symptoms of swine flu in people are expected to be similar to the symptoms of regular human seasonal influenza and include fever, lethargy, lack of appetite and coughing. Some people with swine flu also have reported runny nose, sore throat, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea.

#### Can people catch swine flu from eating pork?

No. Swine influenza viruses are not transmitted by food. Eating properly handled and cooked pork is safe. Cooking pork to an internal temperature of 160°F kills the swine flu virus as it does other bacteria and viruses.

#### How does swine flu spread?

The new swine flu virus spreads just like regular flu. You could pick up germs directly from an infected person, or by touching an object they recently touched, and then touching your eyes, mouth, or nose, delivering their germs for your own infection. Infected people can start spreading flu germs up to a day before symptoms start, and for seven days after getting sick. Additionally, the swine flu virus can become airborne if you cough or sneeze without covering your nose and mouth, sending germs into the air.

#### What medications are available to treat swine flu infections in humans?

There are four different antiviral drugs that are licensed for use in the US for the treatment of influenza: amantadine, rimantadine, oseltamivir, and zanamivir. While most swine influenza viruses have been susceptible to all four drugs, the most recent swine influenza viruses isolated from humans are resistant to amantadine and rimantadine. At this time, CDC recommends the use of oseltamivir or zanamivir for the treatment or prevention of infection from swine influenza viruses.

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

There is no vaccine available right now to protect against swine flu. There are everyday actions that can help prevent the spread of germs that cause respiratory illnesses like influenza. Take these everyday steps to protect your health:

- 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.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- Drink plenty of fluids and eat nutritious foods.

## What should I do if I get sick?

If you get sick with influenza, the CDC recommends that you stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.

If you live in areas where swine 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.

## How serious is swine flu infection?

The severity of cases has varied widely. In Mexico, there have been deaths and other severe cases. Early cases in the U.S. have been mild, but that could change. CDC researchers are actively investigating to learn more about the differences between the cases in Mexico and those in the U.S.

## REDUCING/PREVENTING EXPOSURE TO THE INFLUENZA

Employers must be proactive in preventing the exposure or rapid spread of the Swine Flu. Guidelines provided by the CDC and WHO are outlined below and should be followed to ensure the impact on company operations is as limited as possible.

- Inform employees of the presence of Swine Flu and the potential for an outbreak within the company. Provide regular updates on the status of the outbreak. Daily updates are available from the Center for Disease Control (CDC).
- Increase cleaning in employee break areas and bathrooms.
- Educate employees on proper sanitary procedures for coughing and sneezing. Have employees throw tissues in the trash after use.
- Monitor employee health and investigate claims of flu.
- Encourage employees to go home when feeling ill and not come back to work until they are well.

- Inform all employees of the need for hand washing and provide guidelines for proper hand washing. Post hand washing signs in employee bathrooms.
- Tell employees the importance of not touching eyes, nose, or mouth if suspected of being around another employee with flu symptoms.

## BUSINESS CONTINUITY PLANNING

### Continuing Business Operations

Should the H1N1 outbreak continue to spread across the globe and affect greater numbers of people, there could be a drain on the American workforce. The WHO suggests companies should consider planning now for ways to run their businesses with reduced staff. This means cross training employees to do multiple jobs. Businesses would also be wise to plan production process with 10% less workforce, 20% less, and 30%. Having a plan in place now allows for quick decisions to be made and modifications to business operations easier to implement in the event a large percent of the workforce is temporarily unavailable.

The following are items that should be reviewed prior to a large reduction in the workforce due to a pandemic outbreak:

- Develop a business operational plan outlining how your company will operate with up to 30% fewer employees.
- Review and update your company's business continuity plan.
- Conduct drills to identify shortcomings in company operations with limited staff.
- Identify jobs that can be conducted remotely, allowing workers to be productive while limiting their exposure.
- Develop a job cross training program to ensure critical operations can be run by several employees.
- Consider an agreement with a temporary work provider in your area that can fill in temporary gaps in labor.

### Supply Chain Operations

Another aspect of business continuity planning is the effect suppliers will have on a company's ability to get critical parts or services. This component of risk management planning is most important for companies with a single or main source supplier. If that supplier cannot provide its product or service due to a reduction in the workforce, the company will have to either identify additional suppliers or stockpile supplies in anticipation of reduced inventory.

The following are steps a company can take to reduce the exposure to supplier shortfalls:

- Review the supplier's business continuity plan.
  - Maintain knowledge of the supplier's inventory and production rates.
  - Contractually negotiate priority shipments of supplies.
  - Stockpile or increase inventory of critical parts/supplies.
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## OUTBREAK RESPONSE

If a Swine Flu outbreak makes it way into your workplace the ultimate goal should be to prevent the spread of the flu and contain employees who have been infected. While the best way to prevent the spread is to avoid contact with a sick person, people can be contagious for up to 24 hours before they show symptoms of the flu. If the Swine Flu is confirmed in your company's workplace, the following guidelines will help reduce the impact of its effects:

1. Interview employees daily to get a quick jump on employees expressing signs of symptoms.
2. Sanitize work areas as thoroughly as possible. Sanitize employee break areas and bathrooms often. Clean door handles and other surfaces with which employees come in contact.
3. Treat all bodily release events as though they are contaminated. Follow standard blood-borne pathogens clean up procedures. Wear appropriate personal protective equipment.
4. Sanitize a 25 foot radius of any bodily release events.
5. Provide hand sanitizer in all work areas to allow employees to maintain sanitary conditions.
6. Educate employees on the risk of hand shaking and hugging. The spread of the flu is easily spread through close contact.
7. Find alternative methods of disseminating information to employees other than large group meetings.

While it is difficult to completely prevent the spread of the flu, the steps outlined in this bulletin will ultimately help reduce the impact of the Swine Flu on your organization.

If you want additional information or if you wish to discuss your company's readiness to a potential pandemic event, contact your Frank Crystal Loss Control consultant.

## References:

World Health Organization (WHO) [www.who.int/en/](http://www.who.int/en/)

Center For Disease and Control (CDC) [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

National Parks Service Public Health Program – Norovirus Response and Cleaning Fact sheet

South Nevada Health District – Guidelines for the prevention and control of Norovirus in Hotel/Casino

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