

## **Guidance for Businesses Mills County Public Health**

Centers for Disease Control is releasing new guidance that recommends actions that non-healthcare employers should take now to decrease the spread of seasonal flu and 2009 H1N1 flu in the workplace and to help maintain business continuity during the 2009-2010 flu season. This guidance is a condensed and revised version of that guidance.

All employers must balance a variety of objectives when determining how best to decrease the spread of influenza and lower the impact of influenza in the workplace. They should consider and communicate their objectives including all or any of the following: (a) reducing transmission among staff, (b) protecting people who are at increased risk of influenza related complications from getting infected with influenza, (c) maintaining business operations, and (d) minimizing adverse effects on other entities in their supply chains.

Some of the key indicators that should be used when making decisions on appropriate responses are:

- Disease severity (i.e., hospitalization and death rates) in the community;
- Extent of disease (number of people who are sick) in the community.
- Amount of worker absenteeism in your business or organization;
- Impact of disease on workforce populations that are vulnerable and at higher risk (e.g., pregnant women, employees with certain chronic medical conditions that put them at increased risk for complications of influenza); and
- Other factors that may affect employees' ability to get to work, such as school dismissals or closures due to high levels of illness in children or school dismissals.

Businesses should have an understanding of their normal seasonal absenteeism rates and know how to monitor their personnel for any unusual increases in absenteeism through the fall and winter. Assess essential business functions to determine at what threshold of absenteeism those functions would be threatened if absenteeism escalates.

Local public health officials will be issuing guidance specific to their communities. Coordination with the officials is strongly encouraged for all businesses so that timely and accurate information can guide appropriate responses in each location where their operations reside.

One of the best ways to reduce the spread of influenza is to keep sick people away from well people. However, in the fall and winter, it will not be possible to quickly determine if workers who are ill have 2009 H1N1, seasonal influenza, or any number of other different conditions based on symptoms alone. 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. The symptoms include fever or chills and cough or sore throat. In addition, symptoms of flu can include runny nose, body aches, headache, tiredness, diarrhea, or vomiting. Note that fever is usually described as 100° F or greater.

Other measures to help reduce the spread of influenza should be considered. These include encouraging hand washing and covering coughs and sneezes, and routine cleaning of commonly touched surfaces. If severity of disease increases, employers should be ready to implement additional measures while continuing to rigorously implement the interventions currently in place. Social distancing may be recommended. This includes a variety of methods for increasing the physical distance between people to reduce the spread of disease and may include canceling large business-related meetings, spacing workers farther apart in the workplace, canceling nonessential travel, and recommending work-from-home strategies for workers that can conduct their business remotely.

As stated above, this is a rough overview of the guidance set forth by the CDC. We would encourage you to check out the web site at <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/business/> for more specific information and assistance tools.