



Mark Parkinson, Governor
Roderick L. Bremby, Secretary

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
AND ENVIRONMENT

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Division of Health

September 2, 2009

Dear Kansas Employer:

Employer Business Guidance for the 2009 – 2010 Influenza Season

As you are probably aware, the 2009 H1N1 virus formerly known as the “swine flu” has reached pandemic levels. The H1N1 pandemic has already peaked in some countries in the southern hemisphere. There the impact has not been as bad as feared, but increased levels of absenteeism have occurred and have exceeded previous seasonal flu levels by substantial amounts in localized areas.

Hospitals in countries like New Zealand have experienced 300% to 400% increases in outpatient visits to doctors and emergency services, creating anxiety in the population and causing some people to stay away from schools and workplaces as much out of fear as sickness. There have also been adverse effects on businesses in other parts of the world.

We can't say for sure what will happen in Kansas, but as we move into the fall and winter flu season it is time for businesses and employers to prepare. We are fortunate that so far the disease has been relatively mild for most people, but that picture could change, and the sheer number of cases of disease to date has far exceeded normal levels of flu for this time of year.

Together with the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) recommends that you take certain steps now to ensure that your workforce is protected and your business can continue to operate as normally as possible. In an August 19th letter to the nation's employers from the U.S. cabinet secretaries of Homeland Security, Health and Human Services and Commerce, it states:

“While every business has different workforce and resource needs, all employers should plan now to encourage sick workers to stay home without penalty, and to institute flexible workplace and leave policies, including telework and flexible schedules, for workers who may need to stay home. When influenza is widespread in an area, the demands on medical providers and facilities could be great, so the public and private sectors will need to work together to limit any unnecessary burden on the health care system. For this reason, CDC recommends that employers waive requirements for doctors' notes for sick workers to validate their influenza-like illness or authorize their return to work.”

Recommended actions will depend upon the severity of disease in coming months. KDHE is watching the situation in Kansas closely, and we will advise you as needed. For now, under current flu conditions, these are our recommended action steps for you:

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Sick employees should stay home. People with symptoms of flu-like illness should stay home until at least 24 hours after they are free of fever.

Sick employees at work should be advised to go home. Employees who appear to have a flu-like illness upon arrival, or who become sick during the work day, should be promptly separated from others and sent home. Do not require a doctor's statement from sick employees, as doctors' offices and emergency rooms may be overwhelmed. Cases of mild disease do **not** need to see a doctor, but still should self-isolate. We will all need to help reduce the load on our healthcare system so people who truly need care can access services.

Encourage your employees to wash their hands often. Instruct employees to wash their hands often with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand cleaner, especially after coughing or sneezing.

Encourage your employees to cover their coughs and sneezes. Communicate the importance of covering coughs and sneezes, and provide tissues and no-touch wastebaskets.

Clean surfaces and items that are more likely to have frequent hand contact. Clean surfaces that are frequently touched with cleaning agents that are usually used in these areas. Additional disinfection beyond routine cleaning is not recommended.

Encourage employees to get vaccinated. Encourage employees to get vaccinated for seasonal flu, and suggest that employees at higher risk for flu complications get vaccinated for 2009 H1N1 flu when vaccines are available to them.

Protect employees who are at higher risk for complications of flu. Employees at higher risk for complications of flu, such as pregnant women and people with certain chronic medical conditions like heart disease, diabetes and asthma, should check with their health care provider promptly if they become sick. Encourage these employees to get vaccinated for seasonal flu and 2009 H1N1 flu as recommended when vaccines are available. Early treatment with antiviral medications is very important for people at higher risk for flu complications because it can prevent hospitalizations and deaths.

Prepare for increased numbers of employee absences due to illness in employees and their family members and plan ways for essential business functions to continue. Cross-train staff to perform essential functions so that business operations can continue.

Advise employees before traveling to take certain steps. Advise workers to check for signs of flu-like illness before traveling, to notify their supervisor, and stay home if they are sick. Tell employees who are traveling how to seek health care if they become sick enough on the road to require care. If employees become sick during travel, they should stay in their hotel room until their fever has resolved for at least 24 hours, unless they are seeking medical care.

Prepare for the possibility of school dismissals or temporary closure of child care programs. Allow workers to stay home to take care of their children if schools are dismissed or child care programs are closed. Encourage your employees with children to plan for child care alternatives if possible. Employees may need to take care of sick family members also.

Your partnership with us in reducing the impact of this new virus on the health of Kansas communities is essential. Please examine materials on business and employer pandemic preparation for the workplace. This information is accessible at:
http://www.kdheks.gov/H1N1/H1N1_guidance_employers.htm .

You can learn more about the current flu situation by visiting our department's website at:
<http://www.kdheks.gov/H1N1/index.htm> .

Thank you for all you are doing to safeguard the health of your employees, customers and the wider community.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jason Eberhart-Phillips MD". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and "P".

Jason Eberhart-Phillips, MD, MPH
Kansas State Health Officer
Director of Health, KDHE