

Swine Flu Update

Employers should get prepared for flu season



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The President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology recently released information regarding the impact of the H1N1 swine flu outbreak in the United States in fall of 2009. The anticipated severity of the outbreak has increased such that an estimated 120 million Americans may show symptoms of the H1N1 virus which could potentially kill 30,000 - 90,000 infected individuals. In comparison, nearly 30,000 - 40,000 people die from seasonal flu in the United States in a given year, mainly individuals over the age of 65. School campuses will be high risk areas for the spread of H1N1 as students return this fall. Therefore, the Department of Health and Human Services aims to increase the availability of vaccinations in mid-September and experts do believe the greatest number of infections may occur in mid-October.

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The White House panel intends to combat the H1N1 threat through intensive public education programs. Experts and health officials are relying on the Internet, Twitter blogs, Facebook posts, and MySpace posts to provide information to a vast network of individuals. The CDC has utilized Twitter since last spring to update followers about H1N1 and hosts two outreach activities per month to update 40,000 health professionals on H1N1 issues. The panel also urges **employers to be more lenient about time off such that potential H1N1 carriers do not feel obligated to come to work and potentially spread the virus**. School districts are also urged to accommodate students who may be infected by providing take home materials to meet their academic needs while out of the classroom.

Knowledge of H1N1 is the key to preventing the spreading of the virus in the United States this fall. Below is some important information regarding the virus:

- Symptoms of H1N1 reflect those of the regular flu including fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills, and fatigue.
- If you have any symptoms, the CDC urges those individuals to stay home from work/school and consult a doctor.
- If a co-worker shows signs, contact your manager immediately.
- To prevent contracting the virus, wash hands with soap and water frequently, cover your mouth when you sneeze or cough, and avoid close contact with sick people.

Employers, schools, child care facilities, and other high risk transmission locations should plan accordingly to prepare for the possible spread of H1N1 this fall. WGA will continue to keep clients updated with details that become available regarding the threat of H1N1. If you would like to produce a memo or newsletter article for your employees, please contact your WGA Account Executive or the Communications Practice.