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Workplace Health



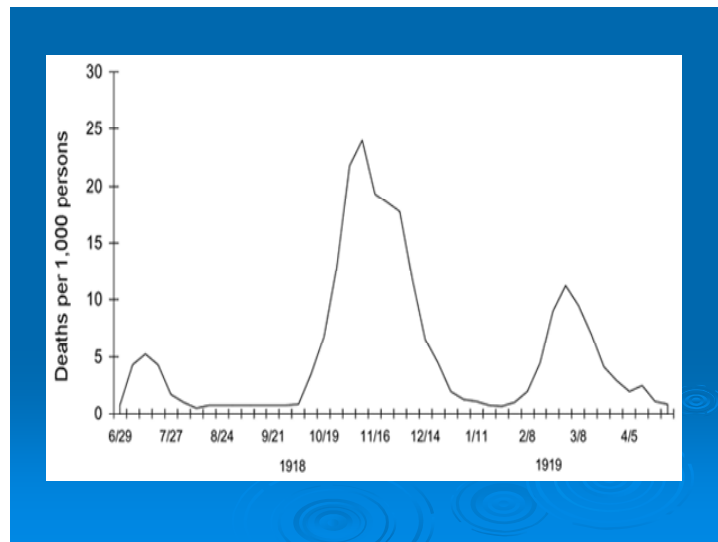
H1N1 Influenza - Useful Information for Employers

What is Novel Influenza A (H1N1)?

- A new influenza virus initially labeled “swine” flu.
- It is thought to spread the same way as the seasonal flu, through moisture droplets generated by the cough of an affected individual. (See “how to protect yourself” below)
- Unlike the seasonal flu which most affects the elderly, this influenza has primarily affected the age group of 0-24 years.
- The CDC believes this flu may be around for some time.

Background of the current situation:

- On June 11, 2009 the World Health Organization (WHO) signaled a global pandemic (infection involving much of the world at once) of novel influenza A (H1N1) was underway
- In April 2009 two countries were affected with novel H1N1; to date more than 200 countries are affected, including the USA.
- Based on previous influenza trends as plotted below, and H1N1 activity to date, the CDC anticipates that there will be more cases, more hospitalizations, and a potential for increased deaths in the coming year.



- For up to date information, visit:
 - www.maineflu.gov
 - www.cdc.gov/swineflu
- Testing will not routinely be performed on individuals with flu like symptoms. More likely, the first few people in a given area or worksite that develops

symptoms may be tested. If several people test positive for novel H1N1 flu, others with similar symptoms will be treated as if they have this flu.

Symptoms can include, but not limited to:

- Fever (of at least 100 degrees Fahrenheit or 38 degrees Celsius)
- Sore throat
- Cough
- Headache
- Runny/ Stuffy Nose
- Body Ache
- Chills
- Fatigue
- Some people experience diarrhea and vomiting

How to protect yourself and others from getting sick:

- If you are sick, stay home and avoid close contact with others.
 - The current recommendation is to stay home for until you have been free of fever for 24 hours without the use of fever reducers such as Tylenol
 - These recommendations may change if the severity of the disease increases. Refer to www.maine flu.gov for weekly updated recommendations.
- Adhere to respiratory etiquette
 - Cover your nose or mouth with tissue when coughing or sneezing and promptly dispose of the tissue.
 - If a tissue is not readily available cough into your arm or sleeve (not your hand!!)
 - Wash your hands immediately after coughing or sneezing
 - Wash you hands several times a day, even if you have not just coughed or sneezed.
 - Offer a polite reminder if you notice others not adhering to proper respiratory etiquette.
- Did you know.....
 - Aerosolized droplets from coughing or sneezing can spread up to a 6 ft radius.
 - Virus can remain infectious on common surfaces such as counter tops for 2-8hrs
 - The incubation period (time it takes to develop illness after being exposed) is 1 to 7 days (Average is 3-5)
 - Symptoms last for an average of 3 to 5 days but can last up to 14 days.
 - Infected individuals are contagious 1 day before symptoms and up to 10 days after symptoms, with peak contagiousness occurring while febrile (feverish).

What employers can do:

- Screening individuals - this may change based on severity, and can include, but not be limited to the following:
 - Passive (less invasive):
 - Asking individuals if they have had any flu like symptoms, particularly fever, cough, and sore throat, over the past 24 hours.

- Active (more conclusive and recommended if severity increases):
 - Observing individuals for flu like symptoms or by actually taking the temperature of employees as they arrive at work daily.
 - Sample swabbing of a handful of individuals with flu like symptoms to determine if Novel 1- H1N1 is present. (This would be not likely be done in workplaces other than hospitals, or sites staffed routinely by healthcare providers.)
- Get “seasonal” flu shots for employees early
 - Recommendations as early as September
 - The vaccine should remain effective for about 10 months, which will protect most people for the usual flu season
 - May be given in conjunction with the Novel H1N1 vaccine once it becomes available
 - This vaccine should be available in the very near future, and vaccination can be obtained from the usual sources, such as Workplace Health, your primary care provider, or at public vaccination clinics.
- Vaccination against Novel “swine” H1N1 flu.
 - The vaccine itself will be made available at no cost by the federal government and will be distributed to state health departments. It is not yet clear who will actually be giving the vaccinations, but it is likely that it will be a combination of school and public health nurses, as well as personnel from participating hospitals and clinics.
 - Since this novel virus appears to seriously affect a different part of the population than seasonal flu, vaccination priority will be different too.
 - The recommendations is that vaccine efforts initially focus on the following 5 target groups:
 - Pregnant women
 - Healthcare Workers
 - People that live with or care for children under 6 months of age.
 - Persons ages 6 months – 24 years
 - Persons ages 25-64 who are at a higher risk of complications because of chronic health disorders or compromised immune system.
 - (People over the age of 65 are currently not a priority group)
 - This is a vaccine is very specific and covers only the novel flu virus, whereas the seasonal flu vaccine covers several possible viruses.
 - At this time, it appears that two doses, given 1 month apart will be required. This will not be known until clinical trials are complete.
 - It can be given along with the seasonal flu vaccine.
- **When employees develop flu like symptoms:**
 - People should contact their primary healthcare provider (PCP) if they anyone in their household develops flu-like symptoms, especially if exposure to someone known to have the flu has occurred
 - Treatment may include the use of antiviral medicine such as Tamiflu
 - Persons with flu like symptoms are advised to wear a mask if they must go out in public.

- The question of which type of mask (“N-95” vs. ordinary surgical mask) is most effective is not clear at this point. Either one is likely to be more effective than no mask at all. The supply of N-95 masks is currently limited.
 - Healthcare workers caring for someone with flu like symptoms are currently advised to protect themselves by wearing a properly fitted N95 mask. If these masks are available, Workplace Health can assist with fit testing.
- **Additional information for employers**
 - Ensure that your company has pandemic flu response plan in place and keep informed on the latest flu information. One source of help in this regard is the CDC website <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/business/guidance/>
 - Provide measures to protect workers such as access to sinks and soap for handwashing, hand sanitizer, face masks, and educational material regarding cough etiquette, and symptoms of the flu;
 - Identify essential business functions and critical supply chains;
 - Create policy for flexible sick leave, worksites (e.g., telecommuting), and work hours and communicate with employees;
 - Work closely with your local health officials to identify triggers as to when to start and end your pandemic flu response;
 - Establish a system to communicate information to worker and business partners;
 - Register with the Health Alert Network/ HAN to receive up to date health alerts. <http://www2a.cdc.gov/han/Index.asp>
- **Contact Workplace Health to schedule a seasonal flu shot clinic for your employees:**
 - Schedule online by [clicking here](#) or
 - Email flushot@mainegeneral.org

Free downloadable resources, including flu prevention and “wash your hands” posters, are available on the [Workplace Health website](#)