



H1N1 Questions & Answers for Businesses or Employees

Since April 2009, the new influenza virus called H1N1 (referred to as “swine flu” early on) has caused illnesses in people throughout North Carolina and the United States. This virus has continued to spread worldwide, in much the same way that other flu viruses spread from person-to-person during coughing or sneezing. In anticipation of more cases of H1N1 influenza occurring in our community this fall, please review the following information provided by the Durham County Health Department:

What are the signs and symptoms of this virus?

The symptoms of H1N1 flu are similar to those of seasonal flu (that people get every fall or winter) and include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some persons who have been infected with this virus have also reported diarrhea and vomiting.

What should I do if I get sick with an influenza-like illness?

You should stay home and **not** go to work or into the community (except to seek medical care or for other necessities) for at least 24 hours after fever is gone without the use of fever-reducing medicine. Most persons recover from the flu quickly without treatment, but those with medical conditions (asthma, diabetes, pregnancy, for example) should call a doctor for an evaluation and to receive antiviral medications as soon as possible. As recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), persons who come to work and appear to have an influenza-like illness should be separated from other employees and sent home after notification of his or her supervisor to prevent spread to others.

Do employees who were out sick with an influenza-like illness need a note to return to work?

No, but they should stay home for at least 24 hours after fever is gone without the use of fever-reducing medicine. Although they are less infectious after the fever goes away, those employees should be instructed to cover his or her nose when coughing or sneezing, and to wash their hands often.

Can employees who have been around someone at home with an influenza-like illness go to work?

Yes, those employees who are well can go to work as usual, but they should monitor their health and stay home if ill. Exposed persons who are pregnant or have a chronic medical condition should contact their medical provider to determine if antiviral medications are indicated to prevent illness.

What can I do to prepare for H1N1 in my business or workplace this year?

Review policies for essential business functions, sick leave, unscheduled leave or flexible worksites in your agency (such as telecommuting for persons who get sick and can't miss work). Provide updated emergency contact information to your employer.

What can I do to prevent myself from getting H1N1?

Get vaccinated with both the seasonal flu and the H1N1 vaccines that will likely become available this fall from your primary care providers for persons with certain medical conditions (vaccine availability for all healthy adults is unclear at the moment). Although vaccine protection isn't 100%, these vaccines can lessen the chances of getting either seasonal flu or H1N1 flu, which will be difficult to tell apart if you get sick. Also, remember the following general key messages for preventing illness and spread to others:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing, and throw the tissue in the trash after using it.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water or use alcohol-based hand cleaners, especially after coughing or sneezing.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth during the day. Try to avoid close contact with other people who look sick.