



Colorado Department
of Public Health
and Environment

*“To protect and improve
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of the people of Colorado.”*

NEWS

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Businesses Encouraged to Follow Updated Guidelines to Protect Against H1N1 and Seasonal Influenza

DENVER– The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment today urged businesses to prepare now for the impact that H1N1 and seasonal influenza could have on the businesses’ employees and operations this fall and winter season.

To assist employers in their planning efforts, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued guidance and a toolkit for businesses. The documents are available at <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/business/guidance/> and <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/business/toolkit/> .

While it is unknown how severe the upcoming flu season might be, the state health department and the CDC are encouraging businesses to revise their current emergency plans or create new ones and communicate the details of those plans with their employees.

“Above all, employers may have to be more flexible this upcoming flu season,” said Ned Calonge, chief medical officer at the Department of Public Health and Environment. “It may be necessary to allow more telecommuting and flexible work hours.” Calonge also advised employees with flu-like symptoms or illness to stay home to prevent the spread of influenza.

State health officials said employers can work to stop the spread of flu by promoting better workplace hygiene by reminding their employees to wash their hands frequently and to cough or sneeze into their sleeve or a tissue rather than their hands. Furthermore, businesses might consider offering seasonal flu vaccinations at their work site and encouraging workers to get the H1N1 vaccine when it becomes available.

According to CDC's guidance, employers should review sick leave policies and ensure their employees understand them. Businesses may need to revise current policies to be more flexible and allow employees to work from home to care for ill family members, including children.

In the event there is a severe outbreak of flu, businesses also should have plans on how to operate with a reduced work force.

“Smart planning now will help businesses down the road if we have a significant influenza season,” said Calonge. “With the economy only now starting to show signs of recovery, we appreciate the added importance for businesses to avoid work disruption if at all possible.”

The updated guidance from the CDC was developed for employers of all sizes to use as they create or review their plans to respond to H1N1 or seasonal flu outbreaks. It includes the following advice:

- Allow sick workers to stay home without fear of losing their jobs. Employers should plan to encourage workers who have symptoms of flu or flu-like illness to stay home and not come to work until at least 24 hours after their fever has resolved.
- Encourage frequent hand-washing and routine cleaning of commonly touched surfaces at work.
- Plan how to operate if there is a high level of absenteeism. Identify essential business functions, essential jobs or roles, and critical elements within the operation.
- Be prepared if schools or child-care programs close, requiring employees to stay home with their children. Employers should try to make sick leave policies flexible to allow for these possible closures and for the need for parents to stay home with their sick children.
- Consider removing any policy that requires employees to obtain a note from their doctor regarding their illness. These types of policies can needlessly tie up already

over-burdened physicians' offices.

- If the flu season begins to impact operations, consider canceling nonessential, face-to-face meetings and travel and spacing employees' work stations farther apart.

For more information about H1N1 and seasonal influenza, visit the department's Web site at <http://www.cdphe.state.co.us/> or www.flu.gov .

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