FOR EMPLOYERS
Interim Guidance on Protecting Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers from the 2009 H1N1 Virus and Other Seasonal Flu

September 8, 2009

The following recommendations will help prevent workers from spreading both seasonal influenza and 2009 H1N1 (swine flu) to other workers and to the community. This information is based on guidance issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on May 5, 2009.

Background

2009 H1N1 (swine flu) is a new virus that has caused hospitalizations and deaths in every state in our country and many countries around the world. Health officials are concerned that 2009H1N1 could begin to spread more rapidly during the fall and winter flu season.

2009 H1N1 (swine flu) symptoms

Symptoms of 2009 H1N1 are similar to those of the flu we see each fall and winter. They include fever, cough, sore throat, and sometimes stuffy or runny nose, body aches, headache, chills, diarrhea, or vomiting. Influenza viruses spread from person to person through coughing and sneezing.

Recommendations

Avoid stigmatization

Migrant workers with flu-like symptoms are no more likely to spread 2009 H1N1 virus than anybody else with flu symptoms. You can play an important role in communicating this message in your workplace and your community.

Do not allow sick workers in the workplace

Workers who have flu-like symptoms (fever with cough or sore throat) should not work while they are sick. They should stay home until at least 24 hours after fever ends. Anyone who is very sick should seek medical care from a healthcare provider. You may need to contact emergency medical services for your workers if they are very sick. Guidelines for taking care of sick people at home can be found at http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/guidance_homecare.htm

Encourage workers to tell you if they are sick

As their employer, you should encourage your workers to tell you when they are sick and stay home. As much as possible, you should assure wage or job protection for ill workers who stay home or who need to leave work to get medical care. Train your workers to recognize flu symptoms and how to avoid spreading the flu.

Make sure your workers get public health information

Be sure all information from public health authorities is passed on to workers in appropriate languages. Migrant farm worker health organizations can help you deliver health information (see http://www.migrantclinician.org/health_centers.html).

Provide hand washing facilities in the workplace
Frequent hand washing and covering coughs can limit the spread of the flu. Make sure your workplace has adequate facilities for personal hygiene, including hand washing. (Providing hand sanitizer may also be helpful.)

Minimum standards for workplaces require employers of 11 or more field workers to provide hand washing facilities to hand laborers in the field; to provide each employee reasonable use of hand washing facilities; and to inform each employee of the importance of good hygiene practices (see http://www.osha.gov/pls/oshaweb/owadisp.show_document?p_table=FACT_SHEETS&p_id=137). However, during a pandemic, employers should try to maintain the best possible standards of hygiene in the workplace.

If you provide housing, it must be adequate
Overcrowding in households increases the spread of flu viruses. If you provide worker housing you must make sure it is not overcrowded and you should make sure there is room to keep sick people away from others. The CDC's guidance for emergency shelters provides advice that applies to housing situations where people are in close contact, such as farmworker housing: http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/guidance/homeless.htm

Recommendations for Preventing the Spread of Flu in Group Housing

- Encourage everyone to cover their coughs or sneezes with a tissue. Throw used tissues in the trash. Wash hands with running water and soap, or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, especially after coughing or sneezing. Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth.
- Make hand washing facilities readily available within the home, including common, food preparation and dining areas. The best way to clean hands is with running water, soap, and hand drying machines. Paper towels and waste baskets can be used. For more information, see CDC Clean Hands Save Lives!
- Ideally, beds should be spaced 6 feet apart.
- If you provide housing, follow standard cleaning precautions.
- Clean all common areas within the household routinely, and immediately when visibly soiled, with the cleaning agents normally used in these areas. Eating utensils should be washed either in a dishwasher or by hand with detergent and water. Cups and utensils should not be shared until after washing. Items that are often in contact with hands or droplets spread by sneezing and coughing (e.g., doorknobs, faucets, etc.) should be cleaned and disinfected regularly.
- Provide educational materials and information to households in a way that can be understood by non-English speakers. Spanish-language materials are available at CDC H1N1 Flu Espanol. Information in other languages is available at CDC Other Languages.

Extra Precautions When a Household Member Becomes Ill

- Anybody with flu-like illness should stay away from others.
- Minimize the number of household members directly exposed to ill people. For more information see the CDC Interim Guidance for H1N1 Flu (Swine Flu): Taking Care of a Sick Person in Your Home.
- If possible, sick people should stay in separate rooms and avoid common areas. If separate rooms are not available, consider using a large, well-ventilated room specifically for sick persons with beds at least 6 feet apart with temporary barriers between beds when possible.
- Provide sick people with fluids, tissues, plastic bags for the disposal of used tissues, and a way to wash their hands or alcohol-based hand sanitizers.
- Linens, eating utensils, and dishes belonging to those who are sick do not need to be cleaned separately, but they should not be shared without thorough washing. Linens (such as bed sheets and towels) should be washed using laundry soap and tumbled dry on a hot setting. Anybody handling dirty laundry should wash their hands with soap and water or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer immediately.

If someone has severe symptoms of 2009 H1N1 (swine flu), they should be taken to a doctor or hospital. Severe symptoms include:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough

For more information about the signs and symptoms of severe illness, please read What to Do If You Get Flu-Like Symptoms at http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/sick.htm

- **Further Information**
  For more information on 2009 H1N1 (swine flu), see:
- http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/general_info.htm (English)
- http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/espanol/ (Spanish)
- Fact sheets in several languages and other resources are available from the Washington State Department of Health at http://www.doh.wa.gov/h1n1/