

Guidelines from Oregon OSHA and the Oregon Public Health Division

Information for Employers on 2009 H1N1 Flu in the Workplace

October 27, 2009

With the continued spread of the 2009 H1N1 flu virus (Swine Flu) in Oregon, businesses and other employers will play a key role in protecting employees' health and safety as well as limiting damage to the economy. Knowing the facts and following these guidelines will reduce the risk of spreading the disease.

Signs and symptoms

Fever, cough, sore throat, headache, chills, lethargy, body ache are the most common symptoms. Some people, in particular children, may also have nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea.

Illnesses at work

- Employees should not return to work if they are ill and should seek medical attention if symptoms are severe or they have preexisting medical conditions which may place them at higher risk.
- Individuals who are ill should stay home until they have been free of fever (100°) for 24 hours.
- Businesses should consider changing workplace environments and schedules to decrease social density to the greatest extent possible without disrupting essential services.
- Businesses should adopt sick-leave policies to accommodate the measures outlined above.

Personal hygiene

When employees are working directly with the public, they should have immediate access to alcohol-based surface wipes or paper towels and disinfectant cleaners, hand sanitizers, and an ample supply of tissue. All waste products from cleaning should be immediately thrown in the trash. When handling common items such as papers, money, or coins, employees should not touch their face, eyes, and nose without first cleaning their hands.

Filtering facepieces (dust masks)

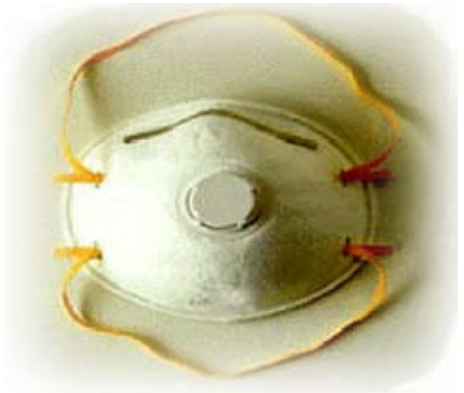
General public (non-occupational use) – Filtering facepieces (dust masks) are not recommended for the general public in response to the outbreak. Covering coughs and sneezes as well as frequent hand washing are most effective in stopping the spread of influenza.

Voluntary employee use of filtering facepieces (dust masks) – **Use of filtering facepieces is not recommended in general workplace settings. Specific guidelines applicable to healthcare settings are discussed below.** If individual employees choose to use filtering facepieces, the employer should provide these employees with a copy of [Appendix D](#) of Oregon OSHA's Respiratory Protection Standard whether or not the facepiece is supplied by the employee or the employer. (This includes situations in which employees choose to use a dust mask type respirator certified by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), known as an "N95" respirator.)

Healthcare – Employers who have employees performing direct patient care of individuals with pandemic H1N1 should follow Department of Human Services' guidelines. Guidelines are available at www.flu.oregon.gov.

OSHA requirements for using filtering facepieces – Given the nature of the hazard (and based on the current understanding that illness from pandemic H1N1 is similar in severity to seasonal flu), Oregon OSHA rules do not require employers to provide filtering facepieces (NIOSH-approved N95 dust mask respirators) to protect workers from the flu. If the employer chooses at any point to require employees to wear a filtering facepiece to protect against and minimize the spread of the pandemic H1N1 virus, Oregon OSHA will not require employers to provide medical evaluations, fit testing, respiratory protection training, or to have a written respiratory protection program. Even so, filtering facepieces (dust masks) work best when they fit properly and employees are familiar with their use. Reuse of contaminated filtering facepieces or using the same filtering facepiece by multiple users is not allowed.

Employers should provide [Appendix D](#) of Oregon OSHA's Respiratory Protection Standard. Surgical masks, unless they are specifically approved by NIOSH as N95, are not considered a "respirator" or a "filtering facepiece," and are not covered by the Respiratory Protection Standard, 1910.134.



Contact hazards

Contact is a major source of transmission. It is important to keep areas clean and sanitary. Employees, such as janitors, who may come in contact with potentially contaminated material should wear impervious gloves (e.g., neoprene, nitrile, or vinyl).

Surface cleaning

Keep hard surfaces, such as kitchen countertops, tabletops, desktops, and bathroom surfaces, clean and disinfected. Keep surfaces touched by more than one person, such as doorknobs, refrigerator handles, and microwaves, clean and disinfected.

- Clean the surface with a commercial product that is both a detergent (cleans) and a disinfectant (kills germs). These products can be used when surfaces are not visibly dirty.
- Another way to do this is to wash the surface with a general household cleaner (soap or detergent), rinse with water, and follow with a disinfectant. This method should be used for visibly dirty surfaces.
- Use disinfectants on surfaces that are touched often. Clean the surface as explained above before using disinfectants.
- If disinfectants are not available, use a chlorine bleach solution made by adding one tablespoon of bleach to a quart (four cups) of water; use a cloth to apply this to surfaces and let stand for three to five minutes before rinsing with clean water. For a larger supply of disinfectant, add one-quarter cup of bleach to a gallon (16 cups) of water.
- Wear gloves and eye protection when working with strong bleach solutions. Rubber or nitrile gloves are recommended.

Other general guidelines

- Prepare and plan for operations with a reduced workforce due to worker illness.
- Disseminate general information about transmission, signs and symptoms of illness, and effective prevention measures to limit transmission. Information is available at www.flu.oregon.gov.
- Develop a sick-leave policy that does not penalize sick employees, thereby encouraging employees who have influenza related symptoms to stay home.
- Encourage adequate ventilation of the workplace, including outside air.
- Discourage employees from using other employees' phones, desks, offices, or equipment.
- Provide disinfecting wipes for items/spaces that must be shared.
- Recognize that employees with ill family members may need to stay home to care for them.
- Encourage telecommuting, if possible.
- Above all, promote proper respiratory hygiene, including the following:
 - Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue and discard the tissue into the trash immediately. Use your sleeve or clothing to cover your coughs and sneezes if a tissue is not available.
 - Wash hands frequently and regularly, especially after coughing, sneezing, or blowing your nose.
 - Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth. This is how germs are spread.
- Have hand hygiene products and waste receptacles for their disposal readily available.
- Encourage general healthy practices such as good nutrition and smoking cessation.

Probable and confirmed cases of 2009 H1N1 flu virus

Local health departments will determine whether it is necessary to identify and monitor any employees who may have been exposed to 2009 H1N1 flu virus.

Employees with fever, cough, sore throat, headache, chills, lethargy, body ache or nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea should be encouraged to stay home until 24 hours after fever is gone.

Other sources of information

flu.oregon.gov

pandemicflu.gov/plan/workplaceplanning/index.html

osha.gov/dsg/topics/pandemicflu/index.html

cdc.gov/swineflu/