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SafeTsmart

Influenza A (H1N1) Swine Flu

This issue, I had planned to discuss contractor management and what you will need to provide when tendering. However, the topic of swine flu is very much in the media spotlight and many workplaces, employers and employees are concerned about how this will affect them.

On June 12th, The World Health Organisation declared a H1N1/Swine flu pandemic - the first global flu pandemic in 41 years. (The last was the 'Hong Kong flu' (H3N2) pandemic of 1968-1969). Now that H1N1 is in our communities, the Ministry of Health is moving from 'containing it' to 'managing it'. Basically, people will care for themselves, and most will not need medical care. It is expected that many New Zealanders will become ill with this virus over the coming months and for the vast majority it will feel like seasonal influenza.

Please note that the term 'pandemic' is based on the rate at which H1N1 spreads rather than the severity of the influenza.

Signs and Symptoms of H1N1 & Seasonal Influenza

Signs and symptoms of the new Influenza A (H1N1) virus are similar to the symptoms of seasonal flu and can include:

- fever
- cough
- sore throat
- runny or stuffy nose
- body aches
- headache
- chills
- fatigue.

Some people also experience diarrhoea and vomiting.

Also, like seasonal flu:

- the worst symptoms usually last about five days, but coughing can last up to two to three weeks.
- Some very young children, people with some long-term medical conditions, pregnant women, and older people, can get very sick
- in rare instances severe illness and death can occur.

What to do if you have flu-like symptoms



- **If you have flu-like symptoms**, stay at home for seven days after your symptoms begin or until you have been symptom-free for 24 hours, whichever is longer.
- **If your condition worsens**, seek medical advice by phone FIRST by calling Healthline 0800 611 116 or your healthcare provider.

The Pandemic and Your Workplace?

Business Impacts

There are two main impacts from a flu pandemic which businesses should prepare for.

1. Staff shortage - It is best to ***plan*** that there ***could be as much as 50% staff absences for 2-3 weeks at the height of the H1N1 pandemic***. Staff may be absent for a variety of reasons namely:

- Being directly ill
- Caring for ill children or relatives
- Caring for non ill children or relatives (school / nursing home closures).
- Staff absences through fear of catching flu
- Transport difficulties

2. Supplier/ contractor disruption -this may include problems with deliveries of goods or services by a third party due to staff shortages on their part.

What can you do now to minimise the potential impact of influenza on your business?

- Consider *additional hand wash facilities* around the premises.
- Ensure that you have *adequate stocks of soap and paper towels* to ensure that staff can maintain hand washing procedures.
- Identify key *suppliers and contractors* - identify *alternate* suppliers and ensure contracts allow you to be flexible should the need arise.
- Assessing core staff and skill requirement needs, and ensure essential positions are backed up by an *alternative staff* member
- Review ways of providing home / *remote working* for staff, this may allow staff to continue working whilst having to look after ill children or relatives.
- Consider increasing high contact area *cleaning* e.g. door handles, telephone handsets, work surfaces and arms of chairs.
- Consider providing PPE for staff (disposable gloves and masks) and alcohol based hand cleansers - These should not replace proper hygiene practices.



“...**Washing hands** plays a key role in hygiene, as **hands** spread the majority of infectious diseases. ...”

Additional resources available on the internet:

The **Ministry of Economic Development** has produced a booklet entitled *Influenza Pandemic Planning: Business Continuity Planning Guide*, which sets out the type of planning businesses and organisations should be putting in place. This document can be found at <http://www.med.govt.nz/upload/27552/planning-guide.pdf>

The Department of Labour has also produced some pandemic guidance on the implications for the workplace in general and can be found at <http://www.dol.govt.nz/initiatives/workplace/pandemic/index.asp> This guide addresses employment issues in the form of frequently asked questions such as:

- If there is a pandemic what happens if my staff have to stay at home to care for family? (answer: work through all leave possibilities – paid and unpaid – before considering frustration of contract)
- If there is a pandemic what happens if my staff are concerned that the work situation is unsafe? (answer: stay informed about the epidemic and involve your staff in infection planning. If you take reasonable steps to protect your workplace then employees have an obligation to attend work)

Other Resources:

Advice for workplaces on air conditioning and influenza

The Ministry of Health and the Department of Labour recommend that all enclosed spaces are adequately ventilated to reduce the risk of droplet spread in enclosed spaces. If air-conditioning units are used to provide such ventilation, rather than open windows, then these units must be properly designed and maintained to the appropriate standards. [Advice for workplaces on air conditioning and influenza](#)

Legislation

[Legislation related to Pandemic influenza.](#)

Pandemic information kit

A Pandemic Planning Information Kit tailored for infrastructure providers in the energy, communications, transport, water and waste sectors. This contains a version of the Planning Guide and some associated documents to assist their planning. [Pandemic planning information kit](#) (www.med.govt.nz)

Pandemic planning scenarios

Practical scenarios that will help employers with their planning and preparation with specific examples on what different industries can do. [Pandemic planning scenarios](#) (www.dol.govt.nz)

Preventing the spread of infection poster

Information on how businesses can prevent the spread of infection during a pandemic including a useful poster that provides a visual summary of the range of controls recommended.

[Preventing the spread of infection poster](#) (www.dol.govt.nz)

If you fail to plan, you plan to fail

The old adage still rings true. There is sufficient time to plan effectively and minimise the affects of influenza on your staff and workplaces. If you haven't made plans for the unexpected look at your policies and procedures and be proactive rather than reactive.

Keep your head up, stay informed and be prepared.

Changes to Obsidium Staff: We have had a number of changes to the Obsidium Family. Nick Shallish, James Creighton and Jen Andrewartha have sadly left Obsidium to pursue other career paths. We wish them all the best and are grateful for their input and assistance, particularly Jen who has been a member of the service desk since November 2008 and played an important role in finalising the new reporting methods for our service desk clients.

