



Health Issues



Swine Flu and the Workplace

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As incidents of confirmed H1N1 virus infections are reported, it is reasonable to expect there may be some incidents of exposure in the workplace. In the workplace communication is the key to the reduction of any potential outbreak.

Swine flu is a respiratory infection caused by influenza A viruses. It is a genetic combination of swine, avian and human influenza viruses and can spread from human to human. Droplets from a cough or sneeze of an infected person move through the air and may infect other persons in close proximity. The H1N1 virus may also spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose, or mouth. Some viruses and bacteria can live two hours or longer on surfaces like cafeteria tables, doorknobs, keyboards, telephones and desks.

Once exposed, it generally takes 48 hours for a person to experience symptoms. Infected people may be able to infect others beginning one day before symptoms develop and should be considered potentially contagious as long as they are symptomatic and possibly for up to seven days following illness onset. Persons with compromised immune systems and children, especially younger children, may be potentially contagious for seven to 10 days.

Employees should watch for symptoms if they have:

- Been in close contact (within six feet) of a person who is ill with observable flu-like symptoms or with someone who has a confirmed case of the H1N1 virus when the person is in the infectious period; or,
- Traveled to or resides in an area where there are confirmed cases of the H1N1 virus.

Employees who may have been exposed to a person with a confirmed case of H1N1 or from an area with confirmed cases of H1N1 are strongly encouraged to do the following:

- A person with no symptoms: Watch for symptoms. Self-isolate and seek medical care if symptoms appear.
- A person with symptoms of H1N1 virus: Self-isolate for seven days after the onset of the illness or 24 hours after the symptoms have been resolved, whichever is longer.

When employees see their health care providers regarding the H1N1 virus, the employee should make sure that they request medical documentation to present to their employers which specifies the presence/absence or suspicion of swine flu, the estimated duration of absence and estimated return to work date. The immediate obtainment of this information will keep companies apprised of the situation. Good communication will assist in the protection of the workplace from potential outbreaks and assist Human Resources in ascertaining the nature and response to the absences. ★

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In the Spring of 2009, the surrounding community starting having reports of H1N1 in the schools. With that, the Caterpillar-Aurora facility pulled together its Emergency Response Team to address the situation. At that time, the team felt they were unprepared with information about the pandemic, however, began pulling together a response plan in the event the H1N1 impacted the business. Luckily, the H1N1 string did not spread and thus the team did not have to enact their plan (which included social distancing – gate screening). The minor scare in the Spring, however, led the team to seek information and plan early for the potential of a Fall 2009 pandemic.

Currently, the Aurora facility has a Pandemic Response Team that meets weekly. The team is a cross-functional group of employees from HR, Engineering, Facilities, Safety, Medical and Security. The team not only works together on facility specific planning, it is linked with Caterpillar's Crisis Management Team that is providing direction from a corporate perspective. The Aurora team has created response plans in the event H1N1 impacts the facility. The team has created a Gate Screening process to screen employees and visitors before entering the facility. The process has been tested twice and the team continues to put plans together on how to react to a Center for Disease (CDC) social distancing requirement. Communications has been a big key to preparing for the H1N1 pandemic. In addition to communicating about the mock screenings, communications on precautionary measures has been common and also creating an in-depth "what to do" communication plan is in the process if the H1N1 pandemic evolves and requires gate screenings.

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