



Interim Guidance for Alaska Employers for Protection of Migratory and Seasonal Workers from the Novel H1N1 Virus (Swine flu)

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This document provides interim guidance for Alaska employers of migratory and seasonal workers to help prevent infection with the **novel H1N1 flu** virus. This guidance, which is based on interim CDC guidance, is intended to provide supplemental information recognizing the unique characteristics of this worker population.

Background

A **novel H1N1 flu** virus has infected humans in most parts of North America. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has determined that this novel H1N1flu virus is contagious and is spreading from human to human.

The symptoms of this novel H1N1 flu are similar to the symptoms of regular human seasonal influenza and include:

- Feeling feverish or temperature greater than 100°F (37.8°C)
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Body aches, headache, chills and fatigue
- Less common symptoms include diarrhea and vomiting

Additional information about the novel H1N1 influenza virus is available at <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu>.

Migratory and seasonal workers in Alaska represent a large summer labor market, especially in the fishing and tourism industries. Alaska's migratory and seasonal workers include persons who may not speak or read English well, and may travel extensively and relocate frequently. Furthermore, workers in very remote regions of Alaska may have limited access to health care services. As in other work settings, some migratory and seasonal workers in Alaska may not be willing to report when they are sick to their employers or to seek medical attention.

Interim Recommendations

- *Avoid stigmatization*

It is important to emphasize that novel H1N1 flu is spreading globally, so it will be difficult to determine the risk that any particular migratory or seasonal worker poses in spreading novel H1N1 flu. Employers should communicate this message within the workplace and to their surrounding communities in order to help avoid unwarranted stigmatization of this population. More information about the effect of stigmatization is available at http://www.upmc-biosecurity.org/website/focus/swine_flu_updates/pdf/2009-04-29-NoStigma.pdf.

- *Encourage workers to report illness to their employers*

Migratory and seasonal workers may be reluctant to forego wages or possibly forfeit their jobs to stay home when they are ill. It is important that employer policies encourage self-reporting and self-isolation by ill workers. To the extent possible, employers should provide some assurance of wage or job protection for ill workers who are willing to isolate themselves or who need to be absent from work to seek medical care. Employers should provide training to workers on novel H1N1 flu, including symptoms, how it is spread, high-risk groups for complications of the flu, and how to protect themselves and others. General information about novel H1N1 flu is available in English (http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/general_info.htm) and Spanish (<http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/espanol/influenza-porcina-info-general.htm>).

- *Exclude ill workers from the workplace*

Workers who have symptoms of a flu-like illness (fever with cough or sore throat) should not be allowed to work while they are ill. They should be encouraged to remain at home or in their temporary housing until they are better or, if necessary, to seek medical care. Since some migratory and seasonal workers do not own their own vehicle and may not have a regular health care

provider, employers may need to arrange transportation of sick workers to a local clinic or the nearest hospital emergency department for care.

- *Ensure that public health messages reach workers*

Employers are an important source for information on preventing the spread of influenza. Employers should ensure that all information from public health authorities is passed on to workers. By working with migratory and seasonal worker health organizations, employers can help to ensure that public health messages are delivered in a culturally competent manner. Health awareness messages should be in languages appropriate to the local migrant worker population. Employers should post cough and hand hygiene posters in appropriate languages at work sites.

- *Ensure a hygienic workplace*

Personal hygiene measures, such as frequent hand washing and cough etiquette, are important factors in limiting the spread of infection during a pandemic. Employers should ensure that the workplace has adequate facilities for maintaining personal hygiene, including frequent hand washing. Hand washing facilities may be supplemented by placing hand sanitizer in living, dining, and work areas and by providing individual-sized bottles to workers. Employers should consider spacing work stations at least 6 feet apart, if practical.

Minimum hygiene standards for workplaces are regulated by federal and state laws (see, for example, http://www.osha.gov/pls/oshaweb/owadisp.show_document?p_table=FACT_SHEETS&p_id=137 for hand washing requirements in the Occupational Safety and Health Administration field sanitation standard). However, during a pandemic, employers should strive to provide optimal (rather than minimal) standards of hygiene in the workplace, and should establish an enhanced surface cleaning schedule.

OSHA regulations applicable to workplace sanitation are available at

http://www.osha.gov/pls/oshaweb/owadisp.show_document?p_table=STANDARDS&p_id=9790.

- *Ensure adequate housing when housing is provided by the employer*

When worker housing is provided, employers should ensure that housing is not overcrowded and can accommodate the isolation of ill people. Employers should space beds at least 6 feet apart in congregate sleeping areas, if possible. Toileting facilities should be in good working order and hand washing supplies should remain well stocked. Employers should establish a contingency plan for housing ill employees away from their normal communal living setting for seven days after onset of illness. If ill workers must be in close contact with well workers, they should be encouraged to cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or wear a surgical mask. For additional information related to adequate housing, refer to the following websites:

- Guidelines for home care of sick people can be found at http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/guidance_homecare.htm.
- Federal law and regulations set standards for housing provided for migrant workers (see, for example, http://www.osha.gov/pls/epub/wageindex.download?p_file=F28165/wh1465.pdf, http://www.osha.gov/pls/oshaweb/owadisp.show_document?p_table=STANDARDS&p_id=9791 and http://www.osha.gov/pls/oshaweb/owadisp.show_document?p_table=INTERPRETATIONS&p_id=18958).

For More Information

- To learn more about how to assist state and local health authorities with implementation of measures intended to reduce the spread of the novel H1N1 flu virus, go to: <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/mitigation.htm>.
- Guidance on Preparing Workplaces for an Influenza Pandemic <http://www.osha.gov/Publications/OSHA3327pandemic.pdf>
- Alaska Pandemic Flu website: <http://www.pandemicflu.alaska.gov/>