

May 5, 2009

Postal Service Interim 2009 H1N1 (Swine Flu) Influenza Outbreak Guidance

The Postal Service is establishing interim measures to be taken by management and employees based upon the presence or absence of H1N1 influenza cases in the immediate community and among employees or their families. These mitigation measures are based upon the current advice regarding the influenza outbreak from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other responsible federal agencies.

These mitigation measures are to promote the safety and health of postal employees, their family members, postal customers, and the communities serviced by the Postal Service. They are subject to change as the influenza outbreak unfolds and more knowledge is gained by Federal, state, and local health authorities in combating the spread of the outbreak, and treatment of those who are ill.

Please note that a pandemic has not been declared in the United States; however the World Health Organization has declared the 2009 H1N1 influenza a Phase 5 outbreak - one level below the declaration of a pandemic condition.

Questions concerning these mitigation measures should be directed to your Area Medical Directors and Human Resource and Safety Managers.

The mitigation measures to be implemented are based on the following four scenarios:

- 1) Where there are no confirmed H1N1 influenza cases in the community or among postal employees who service the community.
- 2) Where there is a confirmed case of H1N1 influenza within the community.
- 3) Where there is a confirmed (or probable by CDC definition) case of H1N1 influenza in a postal employee or the immediate household of a postal employee.
- 4) If the federal government declares a pandemic in progress.

1) Where there are no confirmed H1N1 influenza cases in the community or among postal employees who service the community.

Mitigation Measures – Personal Hygiene and Mask and Respirator Guidance:

Personal Hygiene

Viruses that infect the nose, throat, and lungs cause illnesses like the flu, which is usually spread from person-to-person via virus-laden droplets when an infected person coughs or sneezes. Infection control starts with maintaining good personal hygiene - the most effective way to prevent catching the flu. Managers must continue to advise employees on the individual infection control measures to assist in stopping the spread of viral particles. These include:

- *Cover your mouth and nose when you sneeze or cough.* Cough or sneeze into a tissue and then throw it away. Cough or sneeze into your elbow area, not your hands, if a tissue is not available.
- *Clean your hands often.* To the extent feasible, wash your hands or use antimicrobial wipes after you cough or sneeze; after using the bathroom; before eating, and before touching your eyes, mouth, or nose. When hands are visibly dirty or soiled with bodily fluids, wash your hands with soap and warm water then rub your hands vigorously together and scrub all surfaces. It is the soap combined with the scrubbing action that helps dislodge and remove germs. Wash for 30 seconds. Rinse hands with water and dry thoroughly with a disposable towel. Use a towel to turn off the faucet to prevent re-contamination. Avoid using hot water because repeated exposure to hot water may increase the risk of skin irritation.
- *Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.* Germs are often spread when a person touches nonporous surfaces (e.g., door knobs, telephones, pens, etc.) that are contaminated with germs and then touches their eyes, nose, or mouth.
- *Practice good health habits.* Get plenty of sleep, be physically active when possible, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids, and eat nutritious foods.
- *Stay home when you are sick or have flu symptoms.* Get plenty of rest and consult your health care provider. Follow normal procedures to report you are sick. Flu symptoms include the following:
 - Fever (usually high-above 100.4 F.) - may not always be present in elderly patients, young children, patients in long-term care facilities, or persons with underlying chronic illness.
 - Headache
 - Extreme tiredness
 - Cough
 - Sore throat
 - Runny or stuffy nose
 - Muscle aches
 - Nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea (much more common among children than adults).

NOTE: Children are known to be efficient transmitters of influenza and other respiratory illnesses and are especially prone to touching their face, eyes, and mouth with unwashed hands. Teaching children the importance of good hand washing and the closing of schools early in an outbreak may provide a reduction of overall disease in a community. During a pandemic, parents should be encouraged to consider childcare arrangements that do not result in large gatherings of children outside the school setting.

Mask and Respirator Guidance

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), and the Occupational Safety Health Administration (OSHA) have issued guidance on use of surgical masks and filtering face pieces N-95 (N-95s) for protection from human influenza, including the current H1N1 outbreaks. Both masks and N-95s have benefits and limitations.

Since 2001 the Postal Service has allowed voluntary use of NIOSH approved N-95s for a measure of security and comfort. The Postal Service supplies these respirators upon request, when available, and employees may wear their own respirators. Either way the Postal Service is obligated to provide safety information according to the OSHA standard. Postal Service policy on the use of N-95s is contained in MI-EI-810-2001-1 remains in effect.

CDC recommends considering use of surgical masks when in crowded settings. OSHA recommends considering use of a surgical mask for employees at “medium risk” of exposure. Postal employees in constant contact with other employees or the public (e.g. window clerks, letter carriers) fall into this category. Surgical masks protect against droplet aerosols produced by sneezing and coughing and tend to prevent persons from touching their nose and mouth - a significant risk. Masks are relatively comfortable to wear but do not protect against inhalation of small suspended particles in the air.

The Postal Service will provide surgical masks, upon request, to employees. To conserve stocks for future needs, it is recommended that only employees with “medium risk” (window clerks, carriers, and others in constant close contact with the public or other employees) request and wear these masks.

CDC recommends using N-95s when close contact with an infected person is unavoidable. Each of these organizations recommends N-95s use for medical personnel and others handling infectious patients. A properly fitted and functioning N-95 protects against droplets and inhaled particles. N-95s cause breathing resistance and should not be worn by people with medical problems such as asthma and pulmonary disease unless authorized by a physician. Additionally, some people find them difficult to wear for long periods.

It is recommended that only employees engaged in dusty jobs or who have sensitivities request and use N-95s on a voluntary basis. We must conserve N-95s for a potential increase in severity of the current influenza outbreaks. Postal Inspectors, police, and medical personnel will continue to be supplied FFP N-95.

Employees are asked to follow simple protective measures such as hand hygiene and covering coughs. These and other measures are the first line of defense.

2) Where there is a confirmed case of H1N1 influenza within the community.

Mitigation Measures: In addition to those listed under Scenario 1, above:

- Personnel who arrive at work obviously ill, or become ill at work, with influenza-like symptoms must be released from work upon request. Such individuals should be advised to remain off work until they no longer have flu-like symptoms or a high fever (greater than 100.4 F). A medical clearance (written statement) may be required of these sick individuals before they are allowed to return to the workplace from an absence due to H1N1 influenza.
- Facility medical personnel in coordination with installation heads and the Area Medical Directors should monitor sick leave for observable trends that may indicate an H1N1 influenza outbreak among postal employees.

3) Where there is a confirmed (or probable by CDC definition) case of H1N1 influenza in a postal employee or the immediate household of a postal employee.

Mitigation Measures: In addition to those listed in Scenarios 1 and 2, above: Managers and supervisors must implement the following additional infection control and mitigation measures to protect USPS employees and customers to the extent feasible:

- Increase attention to sick leave use and other employee absences.

- The Area Medical Director will consult with local public health authorities regarding recommendations for reporting, testing, return to work clearance for employees who have had H1N1 or employees with household members who have had H1N1.
- Eliminate non-critical business travel, especially to areas of the country experiencing the most flu-like illness.
- Implement MMO -087-07 procedures for 7 days after the last known presence of a probable or confirmed person was present in the facility or until given other guidance by the CDC or local public health authorities. While transmission of influenza resulting from contact with contaminated surfaces is unlikely, influenza viruses may live up to two days on such surfaces. To minimize risk:
 - Surfaces that are frequently touched should be cleaned at least daily during disease outbreaks.
 - USPS procedures for cleaning common areas will be upgraded to include use of a registered antimicrobial product.
 - Employee and custodial procedures for cleaning their workspaces and surfaces will be updated to include use of a registered antimicrobial product.
 - Procedures for cleaning and disinfecting common surface areas and for mail processing equipment have been developed by the Maintenance Technical Support Center (MTSC), working with Safety and Environmental Performance Management, and are posted on the MTSC Web site at: <http://www.mtsc.usps.gov/pdf/mmo/2006/mmo12906.pdf>.

Note: There is no evidence to support widespread disinfection of the environment or air.

- Promote social distancing between employees and customers. Public health authorities recommend social distancing of personnel to reduce the potential for disease transmission. Use common sense when recommending and implementing these measures. These are not work rules—they are recommendations from CDC and others. Social distancing procedures may include:
 - Maintaining a 3-6 foot separation between employees and between employees and customers, to the extent feasible.
 - Limiting contact at retail counters by establishing a 6 foot distance from the queue to the counter (e.g., use of standard barriers, rope stanchions, etc.), to the extent feasible. Remain courteous – accepting mail or parcels does not pose a substantial risk of transmission.
 - Maintaining a 3 foot distance between carriers and customers, to the extent feasible. Remain courteous – accepting mail or parcels does not pose a substantial risk of transmission.
 - Reducing face-to-face encounters for employees; try to avoid holding meetings in rooms where social distancing is not feasible.
 - Avoiding hand shaking with business partners or among friends. If you do a handshake or interact by touching, then do not touch your mouth, nose, or eyes until you wash your hands ASAP afterwards.
- Where appropriate and feasible, use telework or alternative work schedules for applicable employees and alternative work locations to ensure that work is performed in the safest manner possible for employees and customers.
- Post infection control guidelines in prominent locations, i.e., personal hygiene steps, what to do if you become ill at work, etc.

4) If the federal government declares a pandemic in progress.

Modify levels and courses of action based upon directions from Headquarters, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and CDC.