



NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE
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Guidance for Preventing Transmission of Influenza in the Workplace

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Decisions about management of patients should be made based on clinical judgment and current surveillance data. The following recommendations apply only when influenza viruses are circulating in NYC. Check nyc.gov/flu often to find out when influenza viruses begin to circulate more widely in NYC.

THIS GUIDANCE can help employers reduce the spread of both seasonal and novel H1N1 influenza, protect those most at risk for severe influenza, prepare for the impact of illness on business, and preserve normal operations with the least possible disruption.

These recommendations are intended for general workplace settings, such as offices, stores, restaurants, and manufacturing plants. (Visit www.nyc.gov/flu for guidance for health care settings.)

The New York City Health Department provides this guidance based on the best current information. Recommendations may change, and New York City recommendations may sometimes differ from those issued by the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Visit www.nyc.gov/flu for frequently updated information.

1. What is influenza?

Influenza (flu) is a contagious respiratory illness that spreads mainly through droplets when an infected person coughs or sneezes. Influenza usually spreads person-to-person. It is also possible to become infected by touching a virus-contaminated surface (such as a doorknob or phone), then touching the eye, nose, or mouth.

2. What are the symptoms of influenza?

Flu-like symptoms usually start suddenly, with fever of 100°F or higher and a cough or sore throat. People may also experience fatigue, body aches, headache, chills, and runny or stuffy nose. Some also report diarrhea and vomiting.

3. How can employers help reduce influenza in the workplace?

Promote vaccination! The best way to prevent the flu is vaccination with seasonal and novel H1N1 vaccine.

Seasonal vaccine is recommended for:

- Children aged 6 months to 18 years (especially those younger than 5 years)
- Pregnant women
- People aged 50 years and older, especially those 65 and older
- People with chronic health conditions that make them more likely to get very sick with the flu*
- Residents of long-term-care facilities (6 months of age or older)
- Health care workers
- People who live with or care for children younger than 5 years, especially infants younger than 6 months. (Babies this age can get very sick with the flu, but are too young to be vaccinated.)
- People who live with or care for people who are 50 or older and or who have chronic health conditions*
- Anyone who wishes to reduce the risk of becoming ill with influenza or transmitting it to others

Novel H1N1 vaccine is recommended for:

- Pregnant women
- Children and young adults aged 6 months to 24 years
- People who live with or care for children younger than 6 months
- Health care and emergency medical services workers
- People aged 25 through 64 years with chronic health conditions*

Once these groups have been vaccinated, the following should be vaccinated:

- People aged 25 to 64 years who do not have chronic health conditions*, then:
- People aged 65 and older

* See question #5

4. Are there other ways to prevent the spread of flu?

Yes. Encourage employees to take all of the following actions to prevent the spread of seasonal and novel H1N1 flu and other infections:

- Covering coughs and sneezes with a tissue or sleeve – not a hand
- Washing hands frequently with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand cleaner
- Not getting too close to people who are sick
- Staying home when sick with flu-like symptoms until fever-free for at least 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medications such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen.

Visit www.nyc.gov/flu or call 311 to obtain posters, brochures, and other public-education materials in several languages, including the Health Department's "Cover Your Cough" and "Wash Your Hands" signs.

5. Who is at higher risk for severe influenza or complications?

People with the following conditions are more likely than others to get very sick with the flu. People who belong to any of these groups should talk to a health care provider right away if they develop flu-like symptoms or have close contact with someone with flu-like symptoms. Antiviral medication to prevent illness or treat symptoms may be indicated and is most effective when started as soon as possible, ideally, within 48 hours of symptom onset.

- Pregnancy or recent (within prior 2 weeks) childbirth, miscarriage, or abortion
- Age 65 years or older
- Age younger than 2 years
- Metabolic disease, such as diabetes
- Lung disease, such as asthma or emphysema
- Heart, liver, or kidney disease, except hypertension
- Blood disease, such as sickle cell anemia
- Weakened immune system (eg, caused by HIV, cancer, or medication)
- Seizure, neuromuscular conditions, spinal cord injury, cognitive dysfunction, and other disorders that may cause problems breathing or clearing mucus
- Long-term aspirin therapy in children less than 19 years old because of the risk of Reye syndrome

6. Should my employees wear face masks to prevent the spread of flu?

- No, it is not necessary for employees in general workplace settings (such as offices, stores, restaurants and manufacturing plants) to wear face masks.
- Health care workers should follow infection control measures required by their employers. See www.cdc.gov/flu for information on protecting health care workers from flu.

7. What maintenance practices can help prevent the spread of influenza in offices and public places?

No special precautions are needed, but building managers and owners should use good maintenance practices.

- Clean workplaces regularly and effectively.
- Use general household cleaners or soap and water. Disinfectants can also be used on frequently touched surfaces. (Information on disinfectants is available at www.epa.gov/oppad001/influenza-disinfectants.html.)
- Clean frequently touched surfaces, such as doorknobs and handles, common keyboards, handrails, and telephones, as well as surfaces in bathrooms, cafeterias, and offices.
- Maintain hand-washing supplies: soap, paper towels, and alcohol-based hand cleaners.
- Clean rest rooms regularly. Keep sinks, faucets, and plumbing in good working order.
- Provide wastebaskets for used tissues and towels. Place them in visible locations and empty them regularly.

- Keep heating and ventilation systems in good working order, in accordance with system specifications and applicable regulations.

8. What should I tell employees with flu-like symptoms to do?

- Anyone with a fever of 100°F or higher and a cough or sore throat should leave work immediately and STAY HOME until they are fever-free for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medication (such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen). Sick employees should return home in a private car or taxi. Public transportation is not recommended.
- People not at higher risk for severe influenza (**see question #5**) usually recover on their own, without medical treatment or antiviral medications. They do NOT need to go to the hospital.
- People at higher risk for getting very sick with the flu (**see question #5**) should call a doctor right away for advice about treatment.

9. What should someone with severe symptoms do?

People with severe flu-like symptoms should go to the hospital right away or call 911.

Severe symptoms include:

Adults

- Trouble breathing
- Severe pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Suddenly dizzy (feeling faint)
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Confusion or change in mental status

Children

- Trouble breathing
- Turning blue (trouble breathing, not getting enough oxygen)
- Not drinking enough fluids (dehydration)
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Lethargy
- Extremely irritable (doesn't want to be held)

10. How can employers plan to reduce the spread of flu and the impact on business operations?

Employers can develop a written plan to limit exposure to influenza in the workplace and reduce the impact of an outbreak on business operations. Site-specific plans can describe how to:

- Educate employees about flu prevention measures
- Maintain building facilities and supplies
- Identify critical staff and essential business functions
- Evaluate the impact of absenteeism
- Cross-train multiple employees in critical job functions
- Work with suppliers to develop back-up plans if supply chain disruptions occur

- Develop contingency plans to reduce the impact of severe flu outbreaks and consider:
 - Telecommuting or staggered work shifts
 - Increasing space between workstations
 - Installing barriers at work stations where workers have frequent contact with the public
- Examine sick leave and employment policies and update as needed to address workplace issues.
- For more information on how businesses can plan for large disease outbreaks, visit www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/workplaceplanning/index.html.

11. Where can I get more information?

For frequently updated information on influenza and vaccines from the New York City Health Department, visit www.nyc.gov/flu.

Additional resources

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov/flu
- **LifeNet mental health resources** (call 311 or 800-LifeNet, 800-543-3638):
 - Spanish LifeNet: 311 or 1-877-AYUDESE (877-298-3373)
 - Asian LifeNet (Mandarin, Cantonese, and Korean): 311 or 877-990-8585
 - Deaf/Hearing Impaired (TTY): 212-982-5284 or www.mhaofnyc.org