



Swine Flu: Public Health Emergency Of International Concern – April 26, 2009

The World On Alert

This morning Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano declared a *Public Health Emergency* in the United States. The action gives greater flexibility in meeting emergency health needs.

A new strain of never-before-seen influenza that has surfaced in Mexico, Europe, and parts of the U.S., has international health authorities on alert and has sparked fears of a worldwide flu pandemic. The new virus – a stew of various swine, bird, and human influenza strains – has killed as many as 81 Mexicans and sickened 1,324 others in recent weeks as its taken root in Mexico City and a handful of other states. Of the deaths, 20 have been confirmed as swine flu.

The World Health Organization (WHO) is now following the guidelines established in the new International Health Regulations (IHR 2005), and after convening a meeting of the Emergency Committee, has defined the H1N1 (also known as "swine flu") outbreak a "public health emergency of international concern." The current pandemic alert phase is still at level 3, with a suggestion that this will be watched closely and may be altered depending upon how the situation progresses. (A chart outlining pandemic alert phases is available at http://www.who.int/csr/disease/avian_influenza/phase/en/index.html.)

What Should Companies Be Doing Now?

Here are eight things **you should be doing now** to prepare for a possible global pandemic.

1. Pull out your pandemic plan now.
 - Is it complete? Is it current? Refamiliarize yourself with its inner workings and note immediate areas for improvement.
 - If you don't have a plan, you need to develop one quickly.
2. Get in front of your executives.
 - Reach out to your executives in the next few days. They need to hear from you regarding what is going on, how this could impact the company, what plans are in place, and what the company response will be if things go to a WHO four.
3. Stay informed.
 - Bookmark the websites noted below.
 - Subscribe to ProMed Mail for daily credible updates.
 - Check in with your local county departments of health to find out what they are doing and how they will be informing the community of status changes.
4. Communicate.
 - In your pandemic plan, review the communication templates that have been developed. Modify them now and be prepared to send out communications to employees now.
 - Your first communication could be as simple as "we are following this closely, we have reviewed our pandemic plan and business continuity plans and are prepared to act if necessary."
5. Educate your employees.
 - Check out the CDC "Ounce of Prevention" program. This simple and thoughtful program encourages hand hygiene, cough etiquette, and cleaning. Brochures and posters are free and maybe downloaded from the CDC website.
 - <http://www.cdc.gov/ounceofprevention>
 - Aetna has an excellent employee training program on the web.
 - <http://www.aetna.com/employer/pandemic/>
6. Promote home preparedness.
 - Encourage home readiness which includes the procurement of basic supplies and training.



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- The FEMA website has excellent brochures for training your employees: www.ready.gov.
- 7. Assess your plan for items you were planning to procure but haven't yet purchased.
 - Review the key aspects of your plan that may not have been funded. This may include the purchase of PPE, cleaning supplies, hand sanitizers, or medications.
 - Identify what you would need to procure and who you would get it from if you had to purchase things quickly.
 - Determine if these items would it be available.
- 8. Stay calm, be focused, and get ready.
 - This current threat could die down quickly or it could escalate into a global pandemic. At this point, it is anyone's best guess.
 - We are watching this unfold in real time before our very eyes. The situation could change rapidly. Don't waste this window of time. Any actions you do now will be valuable later and could make a real difference.

Suggested Websites and Listserves

- **ProMED mail – International Society for infectious Diseases.** Subscribe to ProMed for daily updates that are credible and validated. This is a moderated site and highly reliable.
<http://www.promedmail.org>
- **World Health Organization (WHO) – swine flu site.**
<http://www.who.int/csr/disease/swineflu/en/index.html>
- **Centers for Disease Control (CDC) – swine flu site.**
<http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/investigation.htm>
- **European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) – swine flu site.**
<http://ecdc.europa.eu/>
- **U.S. government pandemic flu website.**
<http://www.pandemicflu.gov/>
- **US State Department – travel advisories**
http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/tw/tw_1764.html

There are everyday actions people can take to stay healthy.

- Influenza is thought to spread mainly person-to-person through coughing or sneezing of infected people. Follow these precautions to limit its spread.
- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based cleaners are also effective.
- Contain coughs and sneezes with tissues, or use your shoulder or crook of the elbow. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it. Wash your hands.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth. Germs spread that way. Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- Use sanitizing or disinfecting agents often on frequently touched surfaces
- Avoid close contact with others and their secretions. This means the usual handshakes, hugs and kisses (and sharing drinking glasses, food, and utensils, should be avoided).
- If you get sick, the CDC recommends you stay home from work or school, and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.

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