

Safely



SPEAKING

BY RICHARD FROST

Pandemic planning – H1N1 Flu

FLU season is upon us and we are being told to prepare for the H1N1 virus and the effects that it will have on individuals, businesses, services, and our society. But what does this mean?

H1N1 is a respiratory illness that affects the nose, throat and lungs¹. People have no natural immunity to protect themselves against this virus¹. Statistics show the virus is affecting more young and healthy people than the regular seasonal flu, which normally affects seniors and young children¹. People with underlying medical conditions and pregnant women may be at a greater risk¹. Estimated employee absentee rates range from 15 percent to 50 percent².

What individuals can do:

- Social distancing – keep a metre apart and minimize gatherings
- Respiratory etiquette – cough into tissues, elbows, etc.
- Hand hygiene – wash your hands often with soap and warm water or use alcohol-based hand sanitizers on a regular basis
- Maintain good household ventilation
- Avoid contact with your mouth and nose
- Keep common surfaces disinfected
- Use tissues and throw them away immediately after use
- Practice good health habits
- If you contract the flu, stay at home and keep away from schools or crowds

What businesses can do:

- Encourage social distancing, respiratory etiquette, hand hygiene, etc.
- Provide hand sanitation stations
- Ensure cleanliness of surfaces where the virus may reside (door handles, elevator buttons, faucets, etc.)
- Where possible, increase social distancing to one to two metres, such as separating workers by having them occupy every other cubicle, have staggered shifts, consider allowing employees to work from home. etc.
- Have a policy where people (workers, contractors or visitors) with flu symptoms are not allowed access to the workplace
- Have up-to-date sick or leave policies. Will your current policy be adequate enough to protect your employees if a pandemic does occur?
- Update or create a Business Continuity Plan for a pandemic, which includes plans for
 - limited or no services, such as telecommunications, electricity, water, waste disposal, office suppliers, etc.

¹ Public Health Agency of Canada Key Facts on H1N1 Flu Virus

² Canadian Center for Occupational Health and Safety's Pandemic Awareness training course

The symptoms for H1N1 flu ¹	
Almost always:	
• cough (with no mucus at the beginning) and a fever	
Common:	
• fatigue	• headache
• muscle aches	• decreased appetite
• sore throat	• runny nose
Sometimes:	
• nausea	• diarrhea
• vomiting	
For adults:	
• The incubation period is from one to four days, with symptoms usually showing after two days ² .	
• Symptoms last two to five days ² .	
• Employees should stay home for at least 24 hours after the fever has gone ² .	

- reduced number of staff
- increased or decreased demand on business

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Resources

- Federated Insurance, RecoveryWise resource (Business Continuity Plan): www.federated.ca/en/loss-prevention/programs/recoverywise
- Federated Insurance, LP Bulletin on Pandemic Flu: www.federated.ca/loss-prevention/bulletins
- Canadian Center for Occupational Health and Safety (CCOHS), Pandemic Awareness: www.ccohs.ca/products/courses/pandemic_aware/
- Public Health Agency of Canada, H1N1 Alerts: www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/alert-alerite/h1n1/index-eng.php or call 1-800/454-8302
- World Health Organization, H1N1: www.who.int/en/
- For H1N1 information: www.fightflu.ca
- For travel notices and advisories: www.voyage.gc.ca

The information provided is intended to be general in nature and may not apply in your province. The advice of independent legal or other business advisors should be obtained in developing forms and procedures for your business. The recommendations are designed to reduce the risk of loss, but should not be construed as eliminating any risk or loss.

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