



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

These recommendations apply only when influenza viruses are circulating in New York City. They are intended for general workplace settings, such as offices, stores, restaurants and manufacturing plants. (Visit cdc.gov/flu for guidance for health-care settings.)

The New York City Health Department bases this guidance 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 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?

Influenza 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! Vaccination is the best way to prevent seasonal or H1N1 influenza.

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
- 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 50 or older, and those with chronic health conditions (see question 5)
- 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 (see question 5)

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

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

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

Yes. Encourage employees to take all of the following actions to prevent the spread of seasonal and novel H1N1 influenza 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 (a distance of at least 3 feet is ideal)
- 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 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 Hand Hygiene" signs.

5. Who is at higher risk of severe illness or complications from influenza?

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

- Pregnancy
- Age 65 years or older
- Age younger than 2 years
- Diabetes
- Lung disease, such as asthma or emphysema
- Heart or kidney disease
- Blood disease, such as sickle cell anemia
- Weakened immune system (caused by HIV or by cancer or medication)
- Seizure, neuromuscular, and other disorders that may cause breathing problems
- Long-term aspirin therapy in children 18 and younger (for diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis or Kawasaki disease, because of the risk of Reye syndrome)

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

- 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 their employers' infection control measures. See cdc.gov/flu for information on protecting health care workers from influenza.

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, alcohol-based hand cleaners.
- Clean restrooms 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 to do if they develop influenza-like illness?

- Anyone with fever (100° F or higher) and a cough or sore throat should leave work immediately and stay home until he or she has been free of fever 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, not by public transportation.
- People who are not at higher risk of 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 who suffer severe symptoms should go to the hospital right away or call 911.

Severe symptoms in adults and children:

- Trouble breathing
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Suddenly dizzy (feeling faint)
- Severe or persistent vomiting

Severe symptoms in children:

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

10. How can employers plan to reduce the spread of influenza 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 influenza prevention.
- 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.

Measures to consider include:

- ✓ 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.

10. Where can I get more information?

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

Additional resources

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