

September 1, 2009

Dear Marin Businesses and Organizations:

As you may know, this spring a new flu virus strain, now known as Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 (formerly, swine flu), was identified. Over the past few months this virus has spread around the world and is now considered a pandemic. Although this flu strain primarily causes mild illness comparable to seasonal influenza, it generally spreads easily from person to person, and has the capacity to affect our community. Because there is little to no immunity in our population, many people may become ill and people with existing medical conditions may be at higher risk for severe disease.

This summer, the Marin County Public Health Department continues to test laboratory specimens, investigate cases, and provide guidance to clinicians and the public. In preparing for the flu season this fall and winter, we are concerned about a potential resurgence of seasonal flu cases in addition to an increase in Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 flu cases. To reduce the impact of all types of flu in Marin, we ask businesses and organizations to help us prepare for and prevent the spread of disease in our community. Below are key steps:

**Plan.** Create or refresh your organization's continuity of operations plan.

- Include a staffing plan for a reduced workforce (employees may be out sick, caring for someone ill, or taking care of children dismissed from school).
- If appropriate, consider telecommuting options for those who need to stay home.
- Train staff to implement the plan and to fill critical positions.
- Test your plan with an exercise.

For continuity planning tools, templates, infection control recommendations, and educational materials, see:

Marin Health and Human Services:

<http://www.marinflu.org/swine.aspx>

<http://www.marinflu.org/Flu%20Documents/PandemicFluBrochureBusinesses.pdf>

CDC:

<http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/business/>

California Department of Public Health:

<http://www.cdph.ca.gov/HealthInfo/discond/Pages/SwineInfluenzeEmployers.aspx>

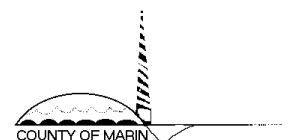
San Francisco Public Health Department:

[www.sfcddcp.com/biztools.html](http://www.sfcddcp.com/biztools.html)

**Stockpile materials.** Ensure that your organization has the following infection control supplies this fall:

- Tissues
- Soap and/or hand sanitizer

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- Cleaning supplies
- Surgical face masks (the public may be required to wear masks if the severity of disease worsens)

**Review Personnel Policies.** Always support and encourage employees to stay home when sick.

- Ask individuals with influenza-like illness (fever over 100 degrees F. or 37.8 C. , with cough, or muscle aches, chills, sore throat, vomiting, or diarrhea) to stay home until 24 hours after fever resolves (without the use of fever reducing medication).
- To reduce the burden on the health care sector, allow employees who have been sick with flu-like illness to return to work without a doctor's note.
- Be aware that most employees will be unable to provide lab test results. Only individuals meeting specific criteria are eligible for Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 Influenza A lab tests.

**Educate.** Teach your employees about the flu and healthy habits that prevent the spread of disease.

- Teach healthy habits including stay home when sick, wash hands often, cover your cough and sneeze with a tissue or your sleeve, clean and disinfect, and get immunized.

**Promote.** Encourage healthy habits in the work setting. Practice good respiratory hygiene:

- Make tissues, trash cans, soap, paper towels, and alcohol-based hand sanitizer available.
- Post signs encouraging staff and visitors to cover their coughs and wash their hands.
- Encourage seasonal flu shots. Consider planning a seasonal flu shot day at your organization. (More information about Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 flu vaccine will be made available in the fall.)

**Clean.** Maintain a clean and healthy work environment.

- Ensure that EPA certified disinfectants are used to frequently clean commonly touched surfaces (e.g., doorknobs, hand rails, bathroom surfaces, countertops).
- Keep heating and ventilation systems in good working order, in accordance with system specifications and any applicable regulations.

We strongly encourage businesses and organizations to implement the above recommendations in order to better maintain ongoing operations and services.

At this time we are not requesting that businesses report absenteeism or cases of disease to the Marin County Health Department. In addition, the Marin County Health Department does not recommend that businesses or organizations stockpile or dispense antiviral medicines like Tamiflu (oseltamivir) and Relenza (zanamivir) to employees. Most cases of influenza are mild so affected individuals should only take it under their doctor's recommendation. Stockpiling and dispensing medications could prevent antivirals from getting to the people who need them most, cause unnecessary medical side effects or complications, and overuse can lead to resistant virus strains.



Larry Meredith, Ph.D., Director

We recognize the commitment of Marin businesses and organizations to protect their employees and community. Your assistance is invaluable in our efforts to limit the impact of flu in our community. As we continue to monitor the situation, we will provide updated information and guidance.

Thank you again for your help.

Sincerely,

Larry Meredith, PhD., Director, Marin Health and Human Services

Fred Schwartz, M.D., Public Health Officer, Marin Health and Human Services

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